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Valmond The Crank

THE FORBIDDEN BOOK

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A WEEKLY RADICAL MAGAZINE.

HUGH O. PENTECOST, Editor.

Each number contains the address of the editor, delivered the preceding Sunday in New York, Brooklyn and Newark.

Motto: "HEAR THE OTHER SIDE."

This magazine advocates Personal Sovereignty in place of State Sovereignty, Voluntary Coöperation instead of Compulsory Coöperation, the Liberation of the human mind from Superstition, and the application of the principles of Ethics toward Social Regeneration.

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Valmond the Crank.

THE FORBIDDEN BOOK.

BY
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NEW YORK :
TWENTIETH CENTURY PUBLISHING CO.,
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CHAPTER I.

Permit me to present to the readers of this book, "Valmond the Crank"—the strangest and in many respects the most remarkable man that ever lived. Strange in his eccentricity,—marvelous in his cruelty—deep and wonderful in his human kindness. Unlike every other person that ever lived, and yet so similar to every reader of this unnatural enigma,—that each and every one, will see himself or herself reflected in the following pages.

It is false, claims some beautiful and enterprising female,—after she has read and pondered,—for in the deep recesses of her own heart she admits—thoughts, hopes, and aspirations, that even the Crank Valmond never dreamed of. Thoughts so deep and subtle, that she has fairly trembled, when she even dared to confess them to herself.

To commence then in the strange career of Valmond the Crank,—picture to yourself a stream, broad, deep, and sluggish.

If there is anything peculiar about this stream, it is its utter lack of everything like romance. A bridge of about a hundred feet in length spans the river from shore to shore. A plain row of two-story houses faces the stream. The air is heavy and smoky with the constant passing and repassing of freight trains over the double track that margins the river. Valmond is seated upon his door-step. At length he rises and moves toward the river. His right arm he carries in a sling. He leans over the rail and looks down savagely into the water. Any student of physiognomy would judge at once that the man was thoroughly dissatisfied with his lot in this life.

But the physiognomist would also see a man of fine muscular proportions, with an almost fierce expression about the mouth; the forehead broad at the base; the eyes large, which betokened at times magnanimity and kindness, and the general outline of the face thoroughly Italian. And yet, strange to say, Valmond's Italian blood dated many generations back, for Valmond was perfectly Americanized.

“D—— the railroad!” he muttered as he turned and glanced savagely at his wounded arm. “The rotten monopoly don’t think enough of a man to let his pay go on when he is maimed in coupling their infernal cars.”

Valmond was interrupted in his soliloquy by hearing some one exclaim authoritatively:

“Daughter Margery, get down from that rail at once!”

Valmond turned suddenly and beheld what to an ordinary mortal would have been a chilling sight, for on the top outside rail of the bridge, and not more than twenty feet from where he stood, was a young girl, to all appearances not over twelve years of age, running along the rail and laughing.

“My God, what a child!” gasped the agonized father. “Jump upon the bridge or I will keep you on bread and water for a month. Down, I say!”

“Oh, papa, papa, I ain’t afraid,” shouted the ambitious young lady; and as she turned to obey him her foot slipped and Margery fell headlong into the river.

The father sprang to the side of the

rail and shrieked: "Great God! if I was only a swimmer!" and in spite of his ignorance in this direction was about in his agony to throw himself after his child, when he was seized from behind by a grasp of steel, and Valmond spoke with the rapidity of lightning, observing that the gentleman was effeminately built and dressed in the black cloth and spotless cravat of the Episcopal church.

"Here, this is no business for men of your caliber. Stand back, I say, and if you attempt to follow me into the river, by the Holy Eternal I'll drown you!"

And the clerical gentleman saw the man with his right arm in a sling, and arrayed in a heavy blue flannel shirt, leap thirty feet into the river below, and strike with such force upon the same side of his body as his wounded arm that the man fairly rebounded and lay for several seconds a stupefied mass upon the surface of the water, and then, to add to the clergyman's horror, he saw the would-be rescuer of his child helplessly sink beneath the black water.

A canal-boat came along, and the agonized clergyman shouted lustily to the

men for help. They must have understood the situation of affairs, for they were running back and forth with long poles with immense hooks in the ends.

"There they are now!" shrieked the Rector as he saw the head of Valmond appear above the surface, then as the clergyman saw that he held his daughter firmly at arm's length,—his left and uninjured hand, tightly grasping his child's long hair, the Rector gave vent to his feelings by dancing up and down and laughing hysterically.

But in a moment his manner changed, as he saw one of the boatmen, in his efforts to catch the hook in Valmond's clothes—strike him so forcibly on the head, that a double stream of blood ran down the face of the struggling swimmer,—and now the Rector in his excitement shouted:

"Murder! murder!"

"Shut up!" yelled the boatman from below.

As the boat came under the bridge the Rector leaped down upon the roof of the high cabin, and was soon on the deck assisting in helping his semi-conscious

child upon the boat, and Valmond with no attempt at climbing up, simply turned upon his back and quietly swam towards the shore.

After his daughter had vomited up two or three quarts of water, she was apparently as well as ever. Then the Rector turned and called after the lame swimmer:

"Here! come back. I want you!"

"No, not to-day," cried Valmond. "I have a special engagement." This was aloud. Then to himself: "I don't want any of his d—— blarney."

"A gritty fellow," said the boatman. That crack I gave him on the head was enough to lay an ordinary man out."

"But you were very much excited," said the Rector, continuing to laugh and jump up and down, "and you all did wonderfully well in a very trying emergency." Then after the Rector had clasped his wet child in his arms, wept over her, and ended by reprimanding her very severely,—but during these proceedings he was very careful to notice the exact house in which the strange acting man entered who had rescued in so

marvelous a manner his beautiful but headstrong daughter.

* * * *

Valmond entered his home and tried to pass to his room unobserved, but was stopped by his mother.

"Why, son, your clothes are as wet as though you have been in the river."

"Well, it is a free country, isn't it, and a man can go in the river if he wants to,—that is, if he stops long enough to ask some monopoly."

"Oh son, son, why don't you get over your ambitious desires and walk humbly and quietly in the path that God in His great mercy has placed you."

"God," said Valmond with a contemptuous curl of his lip, "I have never met the gentleman,—for he never seems to be around when he is most needed."

Mrs. Benditti had become so used to the heresy of her son, that she passed the remark by almost unnoticed. But she said quickly, "Why, son, what is the matter with your head? You are all blood."

"Oh, it is nothing. Get me a piece of court-plaster."

The mother returning—she tenderly applied the plaster to Valmond's wounded head, and when about to wind around it all a heavy towel, Valmond turned impatiently and moved towards the door.

"Gracious, mother, you make me feel like a feather-bed tied in the middle."

"But that's a bad cut in your head, son, and you look as though you ought to go to bed down sick."

"Oh, I am anything but sick, but these wet clothes make me feel as ugly as the devil."

Mrs. Benditti followed Valmond to his room, and then watched him with his wounded arm trying to undress. At length she mustered up courage to offer him assistance.

"Mother, mother," said Valmond, "am I a little baby or what am I? You follow me around just like a little dog."

"But I am sure your arm will have to be dressed. I can tell by your face that it pains you dreadfully."

"Well, yes, I did hit it quite a rap, and I don't like to be impatient with you mother, for I suppose you are the best

friend I've got in the world. You see it was all just this way. A young girl was trying to walk the tight-rope on the rail of the bridge, and of course fell into the river — ”

“Mercy!” gasped his mother.

“Hold on till I get through, will you, and her father was there and of course wasn't any good, for he looked just like one of these d—— journeyman soul savers, and of course there was nothing for me to do but to jump in and yank her out, and now don't bother me with any more questions,” as his mother was about to interrupt him, “for that's all there is of it and there is no more to be told.”

“Yes, dear,” was all his mother replied, and after Valmond's clothes had been changed, and his arm dressed, he took down a book from the shelf and going out upon the door-step commenced to read.

“Son,” said Mrs. Benditti tenderly, and looking over his shoulder, “I am afraid it is those books that you read that makes you so dissatisfied with your condition.”

"That's it exactly," replied Valmond turning savagely, "and why shouldn't every poor man in this world be dissatisfied with his condition, that works for one of these cursed monopolies, and try and work himself up for the better. Just to think of it, a man working on a railroad and risking his life every day, and when he gets maimed and laid up, such as I am, the company have the cheek to stop his pay until he is strong enough to risk his life again, and the cursed stockholders sitting on their backsides, and running no risk, and getting the results of my labor, and thousands of other d — fools just like me, and when we are all old and maimed can go to the poor-house."

"Son, son," said his mother reproachfully.

"Well, I know one person they won't hold in their net much longer, and then there's that president of the road," and here Valmond fairly gnashed his teeth as he continued, "spending all his time getting up his fancy speeches, and he spouts them off by the yard too, until he bursts with his own importance."

"Son, son, if they hear you talking like that you will lose your job."

"Well, I don't care for any of them, and the world is going to hear from me some day too. You see if it don't. If the majority of men were not such sneaking cowards they wouldn't be imposed upon as they are. But I was talking about the president of the road," and Valmond got all the more angry as he proceeded. "Well, this president, when he isn't giving his 'after-dinner speeches,' and when he feels that way, amuses himself lecturing around among the churches, hollering up the beauties of religion and using valuable time in telling every one what a mighty good man he is."

"Oh, son, son."

"And how devilish pious all his forefathers were; instead of trying to make the condition of the employees of the road a little better, or building a Home with just a little might of the stupendous wealth he controls for the men who had become disabled in service, or too old to work,—so that they will not have to end

their days on the sidewalk or in the poor-house."

Mrs. Benditta sadly shook her head. "Well, son, its no use of expecting anything of such great folks, the only thing for the poor to do is to grin and bear. You know what the Scripture says, 'that in the day of judgment the first shall be last and the last shall be first.'"

"Oh, blow the 'day of judgment,'" said Valmond, rising to his feet. "The only day of judgment that I know anything about is right here now," and the president of the railroad seeming to occupy his mind more than any other thing he burst out again, "and then when the big strike came what did the cowardly cuss do but sneak off to Europe," and at this point Valmond's mother made an effort to place her hand over his mouth, but her son avoided her with, "Well, I believe in the English language, and using it to call things by their proper names, and what we all want in this world is more blunt truth and less cringing hypocrisy, and I don't care for that inflated upstart any more than I do for a little yellow dog."

Then as his mother turned with a sigh into the house, Valmond looked up suddenly and beheld the Rector quickly advancing towards him. Valmond would have retreated into the house, for he never referred to gentlemen of the Rector's persuasion except as "journey-men soul savers." But in a moment more Valmond stood face to face with the man whose creed he so desperately despised.

"I wish to thank you," spoke the Rector warmly, and extending his hand which Valmond only indifferently took. "I wish to thank you, for you have rendered me the greatest of all services; that is you have fearlessly laid down your life for another, and you know our Good Master —"

"I don't know him," said Valmond.

"What?" said the Rector, starting back with a strange expression in his face. But it quickly passed away, and the Rector, assuming an air that was strictly business and without invitation, seated himself upon the steps, and taking a small check-book from his pocket, and removing the case from his elegantly mounted fountain pen, wrote rapidly,

and then with more of a business air than ever abruptly handed the check to Valmond.

And Valmond read the check through two or three times. Then with more abruptness than the Rector had assumed quickly passed it back again. "No," he said, "five hundred dollars is a good deal of money, but I don't want it."

"But, surely," said the Rector, somewhat abashed, "I judge that you are in the employ of the road, and all you fellows are generally short of funds."

"That has nothing to do with it, for if a Newfoundland dog had pulled your daughter out of the river, you wouldn't have offered him one cent, and I don't want your money and that's all there is about it," and Valmond forced the check back in the rector's hand.

"That dog you refer to," replied the Rector with a strange illuminated expression about his face, "should have everything he desired while he lived, and a monument of gold when he died."

"Nevertheless, I don't want your money," calmly reiterated Valmond.

At this point the Rector's child came

bounding up the street, apparently as well as ever.

"Margery," said the Rector, "did I not tell you not to leave the cabin until I came for you?"

"Why, yes, of course you did, but if I staid, how was I to thank the great man who fished me out of the river?"

"True," said the Rector.

And Margery moving directly forward, and taking Valmond's hand and looking straight in his face and with surprising boldness—shaking her long curls and laughing all over, said—

"Do you know I think you're just too elegant for anything."

The Rector looked inquisitively at his daughter, and the sturdy Valmond turned red to his ears, but Margery gave them no time to consider the matter for she quickly went on, her tongue running like a flash—

"Now, we live in the city—why, of course we do, and we're stopping over to the 'Springs,' you know. Thought we'd come out this morning for a little walk. Guess it must be five miles over here;" and as she proceeded to shake her curls

and laugh, Valmond thought she was dazzling in her impertinence, but she went on again like a flash of lightning. "But what a horrid, dirty, smoky place it is over here — don't see how you can stand it to live in such a place and" here her father stamped his foot, but it made no difference to Margery, for she went on just the same — "I couldn't stand it here nohow, and when you come to the city you must come and be our coachman," and here a dark frown, black and terrible, flashed momentarily over Valmond's face, "or anything you like. Can't he, pa? and just look at my dress, all streaked and dirty; I feel like a beggar, and ugh, how cold the water was, and don't tell mamma I was walking on the rail, will you, pa?" as she threw her arms around her father's neck and tried to kiss him, "and if he comes and is our coachman, there's no telling what might happen one of these days, for I like him already. I think he's a trump and —

"*Margery!*" as the Rector without avail had stamped his foot several times, he now brought her to a standstill sternly, "Unless," he said, "you stop at once I

shall have to apologize to the gentleman for you," and the pale face of the Rector actually became a high crimson as he abruptly turned away, taking his child firmly by the hand. Valmond stood and watched them. The Rector paused, then turned, and lifting his hat with a courtesy due an emperor (which Valmond coldly acknowledged) and in a few moments Margery and her father were lost to view.

"Yes," murmured Valmond, "he probably spends so much time looking after the children of his flock, that he has no time to see to the bringing up of his own. As impudent as the devil, and as handsome as they make 'em. If I wasn't down on all of womankind, when she gets a little older she'd be likely to turn my head. But no woman living will ever turn the head of Valmond Benditti, for his mind is above all that sort of thing." Then he paused as a peculiar, indefinable light came into his eye. "Yes," he added, savagely, "any man of any intelligence that will willfully marry and bring children into this miserable, hellish world, to grow up, suffer and die,

ought to be castrated; and if there is a good God somewhere, why don't he create all the rest of the men eunuchs? The human race would soon die out then, and the monopolies would lose their grip."

Valmond was at this point interrupted in his lofty and pleasant soliloquy by the fighting of two dogs a short distance up the street. A crowd of tough-looking individuals were setting them on. One was a bull-dog, short and thick-set; the other thin and weak; and Valmond soon saw that the little dog was getting the worst of it. Then Valmond arose to his feet and moved quickly towards the seat of action.

As it flashed across him that the bull-dog closely resembled Vanderbilt, and the toughs standing around, encouraging the bull-dog on, placed him very strongly in mind of the directors of Vanderbilt's great railroad, Valmond gave the bull-dog such a violent kick in the head that it sent him spinning into the river; and one of the toughs, or, in other words, one of the two-legged directors, who was encouraging with all his might the bull-dog on, Valmond struck such a "left-

hander " right between the eyes that the tough director was sent nearly as far as Mr. Vanderbilt himself, and the balance of the directors decamping like a shot out of a gun, Valmond picked up the wounded dog and lugged it home.

His mother came in and found him binding up one of the poor cur's legs.

"Son," she said, "you have a kind heart, and if you was only a Christian how happy I should be."

Valmond made no reply.

* * * * *

And, strange to say, in less than three months from that time Valmond stood at his mother's grave, leaning against a tree. The month was November and the weather cold and rainy. He stood listening to the heavy clods of damp dirt that were shoveled so methodically in upon the rough pine box, and though he looked directly in the grave, yet Valmond saw nothing. His eyes were half closed and he seemed to be dreaming.

An old uncle, and an elder in the church, who knew well of Valmond's unbelief, came and touched him on the

arm. But Valmond did not move. Then his uncle whispered in his ear:

"I see that at last you have experienced a change of heart."

In a moment, and as the last clod of dirt was thrown upon his mother's grave, Valmond awoke from his lethargy, and turning, savagely confronted his uncle with:

"Change of heart be d——, for that's played out! The world needs something more than that nowadays. I have got a little sense left, thank God." And then, as a mighty sob escaped him, he continued, even more savagely than before: "I never want any of this sanctimonious rot around me. Who in h— can help loving his mother? Every dog and cat does that."

CHAPTER II.

The years rolled away, and Valmond, being a wicked man, the image of his mother slowly died with them, and the idea that he would meet her again in another world never once entered his fighting soul. He also reasoned that there would be millions of other mothers born and die, just as self-sacrificing as she, and live just as gullible as she, and there would also be millions of Valmonds born,—but not one, with the exception of himself, who would have the courage to reform the world and whose name would be handed down to posterity.

And Valmond, after his mother's death, became a wanderer upon the face of the earth. He bought wares of various kinds and sold them from town to town, a mighty scheme developing in his brain all the time. But now he was not quite so free to speak his mind as in former years. Yet he believed from experience that there were so many evils in the

world that no human law could regulate, evils practiced by wealthy corporations and also wealthy individuals, from which the poor man could find no redress, that it was his especial mission upon the earth to do something of so demonstrable a character that public attention would be called to them.

But what annoyed Valmond most, was the hypocrisies practiced by religious bodies, and even by individuals, and when looking over the line of shortcomings which he saw constantly going on around him. Valmond never once saw the necessity of using any of his "radical lashes" upon himself, for Valmond Benditti considered himself a man practically without faults.

Revenge and avarice were to him a cultus, a religion. Valmond being an atheist, believed implicitly in the old, old law, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," and yet when accused of it one day he stolidly denied it. But Valmond being such an incomprehensible enigma, the reader will never thoroughly understand him until the close of this chronicle.

Now listen to this, and it is a fact, too. While in a Western city one day, Valmond stood looking up at the windows of a Catholic orphan asylum, and in a brown study. Something of the utmost intensity on his mind, for his broad, mobile features grew as black as death. A priest came along, and Valmond eyed him so like a lynx that the priest stopped stone still and looked at Valmond.

"What do you want?" asked Valmond.

Could the priest have had any idea what was at that moment troubling Valmond? for the holy father dropped his eyes and answered: "Nothing," and then walked hastily away, as though relieved to get out of the presence of the two blazing and inquiring eyes of the stranger.

Valmond sprang after him, and placing his heavy hand upon the shoulder of the priest asked quickly:

"Say, I ask simply for information — are you the priest in this parish?"

"Yes, sir," replied the priest, as he tried to edge away.

But Valmond faced him instantly. "Say, why is it you priests don't look

people in the face the same as other men ; and how many of those children in that asylum belong to you individually ? ”

“ How ? ” you impudent rascal, gasped the priest.

And Valmond brutally grasped the shivering priest by the throat. “ Now, I am a man not to be trifled with. How many, hissed Valmond between his teeth.

“ Not over half so help me God,” but Valmond hung on to him, “ I have told you the truth so help me God. Let me go ! ”

“ You lie ! ” roared Valmond. Tell me the truth, you low-down seducer, under the cloak of Christ, or I’ll choke your mean, hypocritical life out ! ”

“ Who are you ! what are you ? ” gasped the terror-stricken priest.

“ Your confessor, who knows how to force the truth out of you ! ” and as Valmond’s grip tightened, the shaking priest gasped out —

“ Well, two-thirds — are — my children, and that is all, so help me God ! ”

Then Valmond loosened his hold as he said, “ Well, you’re a fine specimen of a man to infest a community with a whole

race of b ——, aint you, and if you had any spirit I'd make a public example of you by calling you out and killing you as I would a venomous spider ! ”

As soon as the priest could catch his breath, he answered, choking with passion —

“ But you don't understand — you don't understand the secrets of our religion. Why it is the priest's privilege — understood by everyone,” and here he burst into tears of rage as he continued “ We are not permitted to marry, and what are we to do ? and to prevent conception is a sin against the church.” Then the priest fairly bristled as he went on “ But no matter about that you have impeached my integrity as a man, and I will meet you upon the field of honor, sir, any time or anywhere you may suggest, and you'll find Dan O'Connor no coward. Oh, ho, you need have no fear that I will be excommunicated,” and here his voice arose into the falsetto, “ for killing such men as you, for you are one of those inquisitive cranks, and no doubt a wicked infidel, and the holy church wants the world rid of you all.”

Then Valmond took a paper from his pocket and as he shook it in the priest's face said, "I have sought this meeting for several days, and our duel will call public attention to one of the most terrible evils in the world, now this paper is a petition to the Legislature to compel every priest to support his own harem in the future, and not worm it out of the poor servant girls."

A gleam of triumph lighted up the florid face of the priest, as he fairly screamed —

"Ah! ha! I have ye there my jolly laddie-buck for this is a Democratic city!"

And at exactly five o'clock the next morning Valmond and the priest met.

"I am safe enough," said the priest when they reached the dueling-ground, "for if you kill me I will surely go straight to heaven, and if I kill you you will surely go straight to hell, for I know you now, you are Valmond the Crank and great infidel."

And at the first fire the poor priest fell dead, at the brutal hand of Valmond the infidel. And Valmond's hard and

stony heart felt no pity, neither did his conscience torment him, and in a most cowardly manner he fled, without making the priest a public example, and Valmond, remarkable to say, was not overtaken by the human law.

But the unnatural duel came to the ears of the bishop, and in some unaccountable way the body of the dead priest was spirited quietly away, and the holy father, the bishop, was so impressed by the terrible affair, that he immediately changed all his maid servants to man servants, fasted for days at a time, eat no rare roast-beef, discarded entirely his two quarts of rich wine daily, and wore at certain intervals a bag of cracked ice closely against the sensitive part of his body.

Now, Valmond in his travels having accumulated a few hundred dollars, decided to settle down, and although he had challenged and killed several persons in duels, who had practiced outrages against humanity—outrages for which the human law was powerless to redress—he never stood by his original intention of giving himself up, defending

his own case, and thereby showing up many of the most terrible evils of earth. He reasoned that the time had not yet come for one grand special effort that would immortalize his name, and so in some miraculous way Valmond always escaped.

The place where Valmond selected to live was in a large city. He had chosen this exact spot because when journeying through this place one day, an idea of such magnitude had flashed through his brain, that it came near overwhelming all his senses. Ostensibly Valmond opened a little shop for the repairing of tools, general jobbing in iron and steel. Valmond prided himself on being a natural mechanic, and to all his neighbors Valmond was as impenetrable a mystery as he was to himself, for Valmond doubted many times his own existence, and reasoned by the hour at a time — alternately — firstly, that he *was* a conscious existence, and secondly, that he *was not*.

But one thing Valmond decided to his own satisfaction at least, and that was that he was not a crank.

And now we arrive at the interesting part of his history, and in order to get at the exact situation of affairs, we must picture to ourselves a promontory about two hundred feet in height, on the top of which stands an immense Episcopal cathedral. At the foot of this promontory, which slopes, stands Valmond's shop, an old tumble-down frame building, but warm and comfortable inside.

All back of the cathedral on the hill flourishes the city proper, with its massive business buildings and superb residences. But in the hollow below, the buildings are mostly aged, dirty, and so insecure that a violent windstorm sweeping down through the poverty-stricken valley would lay this section of the city a helpless waste. But away beyond, lordly mountains pile up one above the other.

At the close of one sultry day Valmond stood in his shop door, as was his custom night after night, and stand there studying with the closest intensity, the stupendous cathedral as it towered up in its mightiness, and stood darkly outlined in the golden halo of the setting sun.

"Yes," murmured Valmond, "see how the trees blow up there by the cathedral and the rectory. They get a good breeze right from the mountains yonder, but it is hotter than the devil down here;" and then adding half musingly, "I wonder how much mortar and stone it took to build that church any way?"

Valmond turned into his shop, and then into the back room where he lived all alone. There was a stove, a bed and a book-case. Valmond was a great reader, and took pride in the fact that he had become a self-educated man. The book-case was a decided ornament, and the entire room would give one an idea of home comfort, and everything was surprisingly neat and clean. The majority, though all of Valmond's library, were books upon socialistic subjects.

He took down a volume from the case, seated himself in his easy chair, turned up his student's lamp and read attentively until the clock struck twelve.

He then arose and moved silently out into the street. The dead of night was cofined in that great city. All was silent. Valmond returned and carefully

barred the door of his shop. The blinds were on the inside. These were also closed and bolted. The lights carefully extinguished. Then Valmond lighted a dark lantern, and removing all his clothes except his drawers and shoes, lifted carefully a concealed trap door that opened from the floor in the center of the room and dropped carefully down into the cellar, closed the trap upon the inside and firmly locked it.

The dim light of the lantern, as he turned the bulls-eye around the little square cellar, revealed nothing except a crowbar, pickax and spade. Valmond paused and listened intently. Not a sound. Then moving forward he placed the lantern so that it distinctly lighted a very narrow strip of wall on the north side of the cellar and facing the cathedral. Then Valmond, kneeling down, removed carefully several of the huge stones with his powerful arms. This revealed a narrow doorway, and Valmond, fastening the lantern to a belt around his waist, and taking both the pickax and spade, silently entered the opening.

Then Valmond stooped and made his

way into a long subterranean passage just wide enough for a large man to pass. The passage ran in the direction of the great cathedral, inclining upward and at an angle of nearly forty-five degrees. At length Valmond came to the end or as far as he had dug.

It was now nearly thirteen years since he had saved the Rector's child from drowning, and Valmond had lived in the present place nearly three years, and during these three years he had been secretly at work upon the subterranean passage. Valmond had now reached the age of about thirty-seven years—a man he was of remarkable muscular proportions—such a man that women only have to see to adore, but how any woman could love Valmond, the crank, after acquaintance with his dark and somber ways is a mystery that the writer could never comprehend.

Valmond now wore a heavy jet black beard. He knew Margery by sight, but had never addressed her since the time he rescued her from the river. He was under the impression that she had forgotten him, and was glad of it, for he

inwardly vowed that no woman upon the earth would ever make any inroads upon his affections, for he boastfully claimed that he had none; for Valmond was what the world calls a woman hater.

Now Valmond was certainly the greatest crank that ever lived, for he not only did not believe in marriages, God or the devil, but looked upon the extermination of the human race as the only real good that could ever be brought about to suffering humanity.

But women Valmond thought little about, except that they were breeders of misery, ruin and death — death without an aim, death without an object. The great cathedral though, whether waking, or sleeping, was always foremost in Valmond's incomprehensible soul.

And so he pressed on and on in his herculean task, and upon this special night Valmond came to what he considered at first an insurmountable obstruction. It was an immense rock, and could only be removed by blasting. This, of course, was impossible, for even if it did not blow through the upper surface, the heavy jar might lead to the discovery of

his great secret, and be the means of thwarting the most original and grandest scheme ever conceived in the brain of man.

But when Valmond became convinced that his only way was to cut a passage around the immense rock he felt discouraged enough, for Valmond had measured every foot of ground, economized every inch of space, and the unforeseen obstacle would surely lengthen his immortal labors many months.

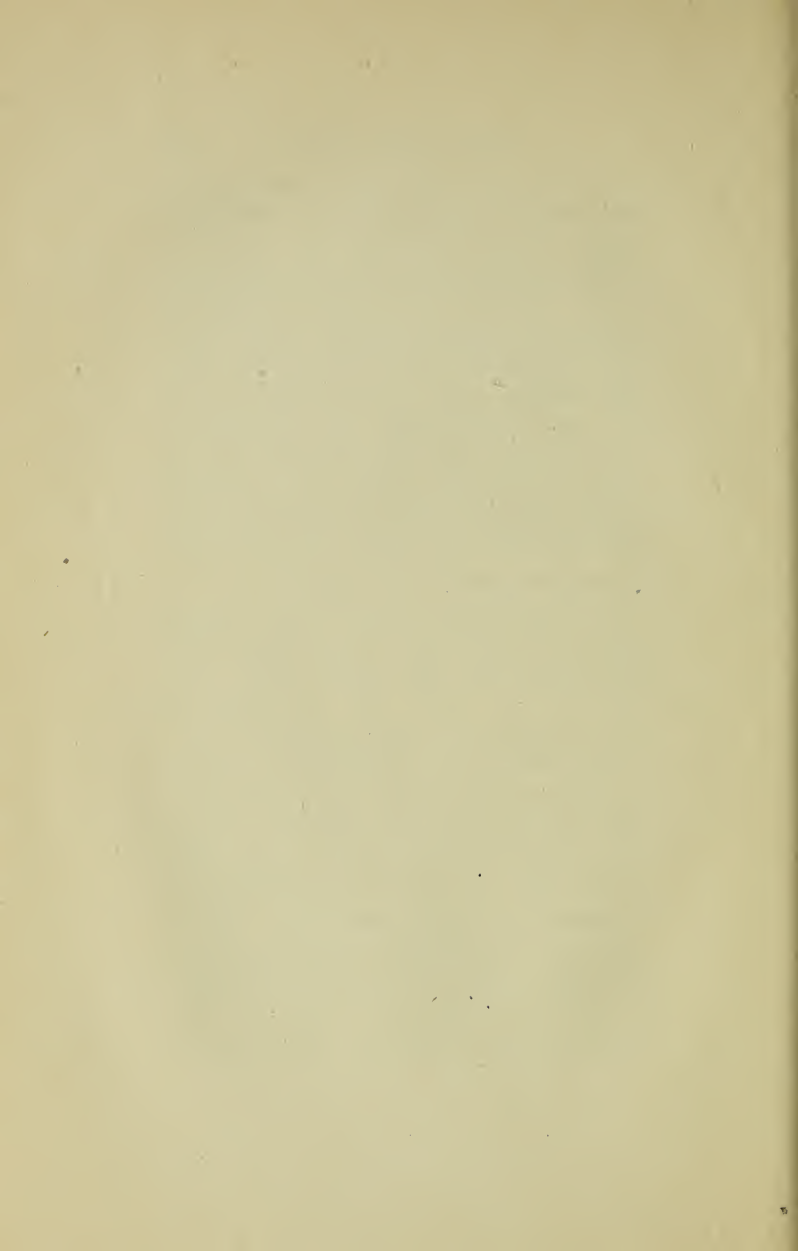
"I am losing time," said Valmond, aloud; "and I swore at the first I would never turn back, but die rather than give up. And by the living God I shall succeed!"

So Valmond began swinging his pick stronger than ever before, cutting his way in a new direction. It was a strange picture — a man naked to his waist, cast in Nature's finest mold, displaying the strength of a Hercules in that giant swing. The lantern had been trimmed so as to burn its brightest, but lighting up only the spot just in front, where the dirt and stone were being pried out in great chunks. Yet all around Valmond

the darkness was Egyptian in its blackness.

The passage, of course, was cold and damp. Immense bats circled around the determined digger's head. Great rats ran continually across Valmond's feet. But, heeding them not, he toiled on and on. The large beads of perspiration came out all over him and then ran in streams down his body. His drawers clung to him, and Valmond became painfully chafed, but still he toiled on, and on, and on — and all for what?

At length the powerful man threw down his pick and spade and sank exhausted into the mud. In a few moments he arose and, retracing his steps along the passage, returned with a narrow wheelbarrow, and filling it, pushed it down and dumped it into the cellar. After performing this operation several times Valmond returned to his little room in the rear of the shop, and taking a refreshing sponge bath in a tank of cold water, went to bed, and in a moment more he sank into a sound slumber.



CHAPTER III.

From about ten o'clock the night before until nearly four the next morning, Margery Seymore sat upon the piazza of the rectory, which was built just to the left, and adjoining the great cathedral. What was known as Poverty Hollow seemed to attract Margery's attention. Yet what was really upon the mind of the young woman not one person in ten thousand would be able to surmise.

Her eyes, after wandering up and down the Hollow for a short time, at last rested in the direction of Valmond's shop ; and there Margery sat all the night through—thinking and dreaming. The refreshing breeze from the opposite mountain, fanning her wavy hair about her superb brow, as she rocked unconsciously to and fro in her elegantly upholstered reclining chair,—her finely-molded feet resting upon the low rail of the piazza.

At about three o'clock in the morning

she felt a pair of delicate arms around her neck.

"Why Laura, exclaimed Margery, starting up out of a forgetting doze.

"I should think you would catch your death of cold out here," replied Laura, her cousin, a pretty little blonde, tall, willowy, and with a sweet-scented breath.

"Oh, no danger," said Margery; the night is warm, and besides I am not in a draft."

Then they both fell into a long silence. At length Laura broke it as she drew an ottoman near, and seating herself upon it, rested her head upon Margery's shoulder.

"Yes, I know what makes you sit out here so much nights and dream — you're in love."

"Not a bit of it," replied Margery with emphasis.

"Oh, but you must be," said Laura, shaking her head dubiously. "People never do such things unless they are."

"But I am an old maid," said Margery laughingly.

"Why, what an idea. You'll never be an old maid; girls like you never are.

You're only twenty-four, and if I was a young man of twenty-one and you fifty, I'd marry you in a moment."

Margery was human, and of course laughed as though she was pleased. "You flatter me, dear," she said. "And I know I'm not prudish; in fact, to tell the truth, I know I have been a tom-boy ever since I was born. But if I could find a man — mind you a *man*," and Margery's eyes wandered longingly down into the Hollow, "well, I'd marry to-morrow; but of course, dear, a confession of that kind is only to you and I."

Laura's eyes wandered down into the Hollow, too, but she gave to Margery no idea what she was thinking about. So she simply said, "Well, then you will be married at daylight, for the gentlemen, you know yourself, are all crazy after you."

"Oh, pshaw, but I said a *man*," replied Margery, promptly. "Nothing would ever induce me to marry what is known as the modern gentleman. Oh, they are all right in one sense of the word, I know, for they have lovely little mustaches and side whiskers, that a person could wan-

der around in all day and never get lost. And their clothes fit them, too, as though they had been molded into them, and that isn't the only beauty about them either —" and at this point Laura put her hand over Margery's soft cherry lips, but she went right on, "they wear patent leather shoes and such lovely white neckties and —"

"And are very intelligent," interrupted Laura.

"Undoubtedly," said Margery, for they are all up in the French literature of the day, and are good members of the cathedral, but not a fencer, boxer or rider among the lot."

"Well, I am sure," said Laura meekly, but with a sly revengeful twinkle in her eye, "You could certainly have your pick among the sporting men."

"I should detest a sporting man," said Margery spiritedly, "as much as all the ladies in the cathedral detest me. Oh you needn't shake you head and look so, I know they do. Why it was only the other day I heard that delicate Mrs. Buel say that it looked terrible to see a minister's daughter fence, and straddle a

bicycle. I felt just like telling her that if she had had some common sense — had not laced so tight — had swung Indian clubs, and even *straddled* a bicycle before she was married, every time she has a child now it wouldn't nearly kill her."

"I wish to conscience you had," said Laura pertly, "for among all the gossipers in the parish I really think she is the worst."

"Oh, yes, she has her faults of course, but there's not a lady in the parish visits the Hollow more than she."

"Except yourself," said Laura.

"Oh, well, why shouldn't I for I am the Rector's daughter, and from an immense church like ours some practical good ought to come, I'm sure, besides people looking out for their own souls all the time."

"I guess people don't look out for their own souls much nowadays," said Laura, with a most bewitching yawn, "I'm sure I don't give much attention to mine, and sometimes when I think about dying I actually shake and tremble all over. But I *do* like to go to church, especially a

magnificent one like this, for it is so refining in its influences, and last Sunday wasn't the music just too captivating for anything? I thought of the grand opera all the time — and oh, didn't your father just give it to the infidels — and if there were any there they must have felt pretty cheap —”

“I guess there wasn't any there,” said Margery with her eyes half closed — “except the member of the — congregation.”

And Laura, after yawning again and again, retired, and as the early streaks of approaching day came stealing over the peaks of the distant mountains, Margery followed her cousin's example, but before doing so she paused and threw a kiss in the direction of Valmond's shop.

Margery slept until nearly noon, and after a light breakfast she took her bicycle from the carriage-house, and filling a small basket with some delicacies she started for a tour around the Hollow. There were a dozen or more distressed families that Margery regularly visited. If conscience is only another name for

cowardice Margery must have been a great coward, for her conscience would not permit her to go to any watering-place this hot, sultry summer, but the money she felt it her duty to use in relieving a few of the urgent wants in the Hollow.

Margery's mission of the morning having been completed, and when riding homeward at a breakneck pace, and — splendid bicyclist as Margery was — when just in front of Valmond's shop she took a "header" that threw her ten feet, and directly in front of Valmond's door.

She arose almost instantly and limped toward her bicycle.

"I thought you were killed," said Valmond, coming out.

"Not so bad as that; but oh, dear! my elegant wheel is broken."

"Only the handle," said Valmond. "Step inside and I will fix it."

"What will you charge?" asked Margery with an apparent eye to business. But we blush for her when we tell the truth; it was to make the interview as long as possible.

"Oh, I will not take all the money you have got. Step inside."

"Not until I know how much you will charge."

Valmond gazed at her curiously for a moment, and then said slowly, as he lifted the bicycle into the shop: "I charge thirty cents an hour for job work. Perhaps it will take half an hour."

"It's a bargain," said Margery as she entered the shop, and Valmond went in the back room and came out with a cushioned chair.

"Be seated; the chair is free," said Valmond, bluntly.

Margery's eyes flashed as she replied quickly: "I am sure every one has a right to ask the price of work and get it done as cheaply as they can. That is the way you do, is it not?"

"Exactly. I meant no harm." And not a muscle of Valmond's face moved as he went to work.

Margery sank quietly into the chair and pretended not to notice him as he proceeded, and neither spoke during the entire operation.

After about three-quarters of an hour

Valmond said: "There, it will not break again; not in that spot."

"Thank you," said Margery. "How much?"

"Fifteen cents."

Margery looked at her watch. "No, I owe you just twenty cents according to the contract." Then she opened her eyes and gazed squarely in Valmond's face, and Valmond for the first time in his life, at the sight of a woman, felt a gentle little thrill pass through his great and impregnable frame. But he took the money without a word and turned to his work.

"He knows me," thought Margery, "and he must be the man." But without a word she mounted her bicycle and rode away.

"Well, she was not much hurt, at any rate," mused Valmond as he stood in the shop door gazing after her; "and what a magnificent woman she has grown to be. And here she comes back; I wonder what for?" And Valmond turned his face to the forge, blew the bellows with all his might until the bar of steel was heated to a white heat, and when Mar-

gery re-entered he had the bar upon the anvil and the sparks were flying in all directions from the terrific blows of the ten-pound sledge which Valmond swung with a power, grace and ease that fairly captivated Margery, for Valmond appeared to her then, for the first time, as a perfect man.

"Look out," said Valmond, "your dress will get burned."

"Oh, no matter; and what great arms you have; you must be as strong as an ox."

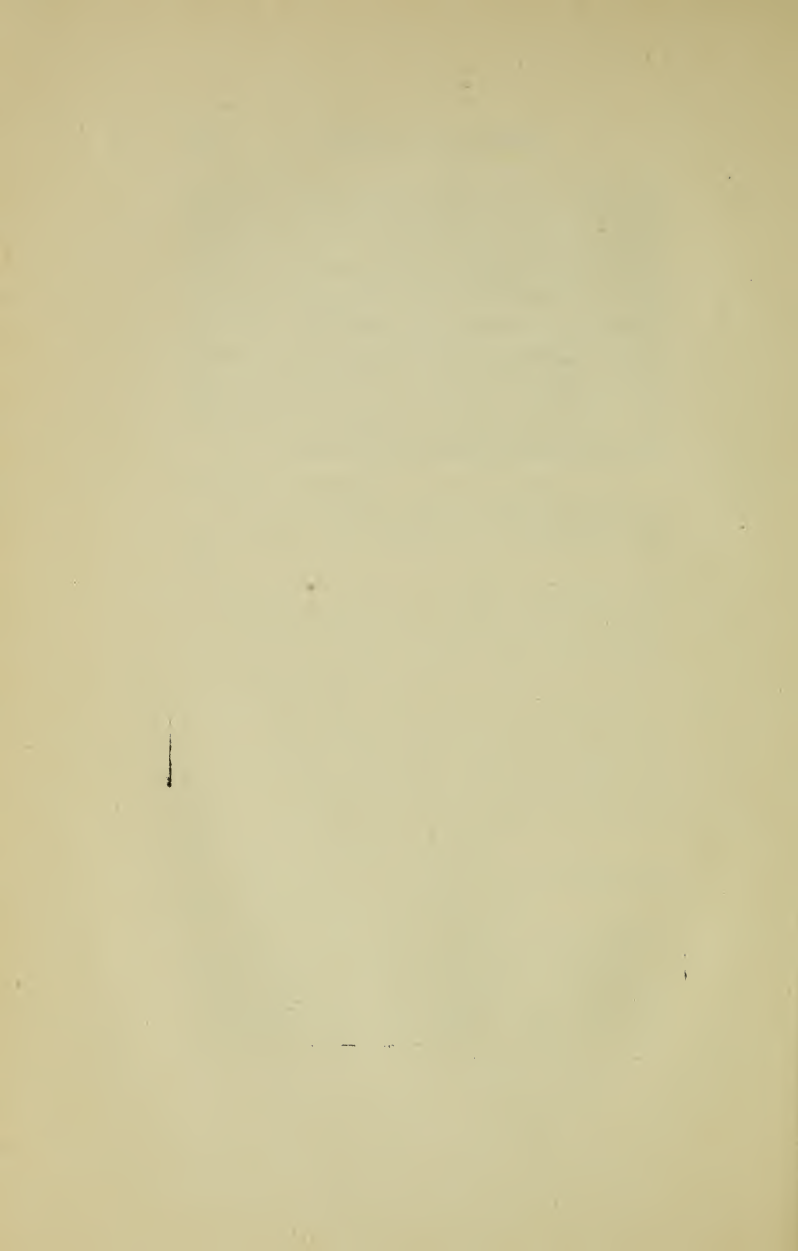
Valmond made no reply, but when he dropped the bar of steel into the tempering tank, simply said, "Now, I am at your disposal."

"I only came back," said Margery, with a faint coloring of her cheeks, "to ask if I am not under the greatest possible obligation to you, and if I do not owe you a world of thanks."

"You owe me nothing," said Valmond, as he turned to finish his job.

"He is not very polite at any rate," said Margery to herself as she rode away. "But what can be expected of a rough mechanic; but how noble looking he is,

and what wonderful intelligence there is in his eyes, and what's the use of my deceiving myself any longer, for I love the man and that's all there is about it. I never was a coquette, but Valmond, my noble darling, I will bring you to my feet, see if I don't," and Margery as she flew over the road arrogated to herself that she knew Valmond Benditti.



CHAPTER IV.

Margery enters her father's study.

"Yes," she said, "I have made a discovery to-day. He is certainly the man."

"What," said the Rector as he placed his pen behind his ear and wheeled around his revolving chair, and after contracting his brow and thinking a moment. "Well, he ought to be rewarded, of course, but I suppose it would be as much as a person's life is worth to offer him money. I shall never in the world forget the expression of his eyes. I thought the man a little unbalanced then, and I think so still."

"He is the last person in the world I should take to be unbalanced," said Margery with vim.

Her father started. "Well, if he will not accept a reward, why he won't, and I don't see why we should run after him. I would never go near the shop if I were you, Margery."

"Oh, my bicycle broke down to-day,

and he fixed it. That's how I found out for certain that it was he."

And the Rector was so engrossed in his work that he turned to his sermon, and the "tom-boy," Margery, went out to take her fencing lessons, an art and science in which she was already proficient.

* * * *

Now, all on account of a heavy thunder shower, Valmond closed up his shop an hour earlier than was his usual custom. When engineering the subterranean passage one great obstacle had stood prominently in his way. This obstacle was how to get rid of the matter he would dig up. But finally the problem was solved.

He nearly leaped for joy when he learned that not twenty feet underneath what was now his shop ran a deep creek with a quicksand bottom, the foundation of his shop having been built upon the banks. This creek he discovered run the entire length of the Hollow, and then emptied into the river. It was bridged over its entire length, and houses built over it. It was only after a heavy rain

that Valmond felt with certainty that the refuse would be carried safely away. The shower had been so terrific that Valmond, upon this occasion, could plainly hear the water rushing down.

Now Valmond removed a trap door in the floor of his cellar, and, in an incredible short space of time, the dirt that he had taken out the night previous was disposed of.

"Ah," said Valmond, as he rubbed his hands together, "how forcibly the current carries it away. A million tons, I believe, could be thrown down there without danger of stopping it up. Yes," said Valmond, gleefully, "only about a year more and the name of Valmond will be the greatest on the earth."

But Valmond would not work in the subterranean passage to-night, for there was some outside engineering that must be attended to. So, carefully locking up his shop, he went out, but stood for a moment on his door-step and gazed up at the great cathedral. The rear windows of the rectory were brilliantly lighted. It was early yet for his purpose, so he decided to walk down the

Hollow and take a glance at the misery and suffering that was so chronic in this wretched locality.

Valmond earned enough in his little shop to support himself comfortably, and at times considerably more, but Valmond was never known to have a dollar, and it would be sacrilege for the writer, who knew Valmond well, to state just what this infidel crank did with his surplus change, for I am determined that no reader of this chronicle shall respect Valmond in the least, for, when he returned from his tour through the Hollow and stood looking up at the grand cathedral, he said with a curse and in the most irreverent manner possible—"That pile of stone and mortar up there is about as much practical good to assist poverty as a little yellow dog, but what a glorious godsend it is to the ambitious high-toned sharp."

Two men passed so closely to Valmond that they nearly touched him. He overheard one say to the other: "It is very funny how the river fills up at the mouth of the creek. Why, it has been dredged there three times this year to my certain

knowledge, and there ain't water enough there now to dock a tug boat."

"I wonder who those men are?" said Valmond, after they had passed. But no matter; if I was suspected, no such remark would ever be made in my hearing." But shrewd as Valmond was, he had never been a detective.

Valmond looked at his watch — half-past nine, and then turning, walked rapidly towards the cathedral, and stopping at the foot of the hill endeavored to trace the line from the surface of the subterranean passage. The angle of the hill was about forty-five degrees, and the earth composed of a sort of sandy loam, and Valmond, moving slowly up, measured carefully every step of the way.

Now he came to a spot that he considered was directly over the immense rock that he must dig around, and taking out a note-book commenced to draw as well as he could in the darkness, a diagram. The underground passage must end directly under the center of the great cathedral.

"I wonder," said Valmond, "how they

live up there, and what they are doing now?"

He paused a moment wondering if Margery was there and what she was doing. A sudden impulse seized him. He would see.

Valmond reached the rear of the rectory, and gazing upward toward the brilliantly-lighted third-story, and then at the posts that supported the three piazzas, he removed his shoes and coat and commenced to climb. And Valmond went up the supporting posts like a cat, and reaching the third piazza, he sprang noiselessly over the rail and approached the closed Venetian blinds. The window, he observed, was raised to the half.

Valmond quietly turned the blinds a quarter of an inch and cautiously peeped in. There sat the Rev. Dr. Seymore in an easy chair, smoking a fragrant cigar, with an opened bottle of champagne on the table convenient to his hand, with delicate chased glasses at its side, which the Rector every now and then raised to his lips, quaffing the delicious beverage in the smallest possible sips.

On the table were strewn about the

latest magazines and periodicals. The Rector's head was thrown back and the rings of smoke that Valmond saw methodically thrown easily one after another against the superbly frescoed ceiling — put Valmond forcibly in mind of an elegant bartender he once knew, and who, Valmond thought, could never have a rival in the great art of throwing rings.

Valmond said to himself: "Take your comfort while you can, for your days are numbered," and looked cautiously around to see how he should make his escape in case of a sudden emergency.

Now, Valmond had always prided himself upon the fact that he never had experienced the sensation of fear, and now he reasoned that it was expedient that he must use the utmost caution, especially this night. For any mishap now would work detrimentally to his mighty scheme, which, although terrible in its execution, would have a civilizing effect upon all future ages.

He saw the Rector lean over and touch an electric bell, and in a moment a servant appeared.

"James," he said, "have the carriage at the door at 6.30 in the morning, as I wish to take the 7 o'clock train. See that my reel and seven-ounce split bamboo rod are all right, and also look over my fly-book, and go to Hern's and supply any missing flies; and, James, also see that my wading boots are in good condition; and, *James*, come to think of it, if you have time you had better oil up my seven and a half pound hammerless. See that the shells are loaded with three and a half drams of powder, one and one-fourth ounces of No. 8 shot, for if the trout don't bite I think I will take a turn at the woodcock and partridge, and, *James*, ask my daughter to step up here."

"Yes, sir."

"Margery," said the Rector upon her entrance, "I wish to-morrow that you would see that my typewriter makes a copy of this temperance lecture. I am going to deliver it Sabbath evening before the Railroad Young Men's Christian Association, and I tell you I have put the subject pretty straight too. I am going to handle them without gloves, I

can tell you. Will you have a glass of champagne, dear; it will do you good?"

"No, thanks; I don't believe in drinking," replied Margery bluntly and thoughtlessly.

"But champagne is not drinking," said the Rector with emphasis, "and good champagne always does people good. It is the low beer and vile whiskey sold over the bars all over the country that does the injury. Now this is something very choice," said her father, snapping his finger nail against the delicate glass, and placing the rim to his ear. "Yes, yes," he went on, "*very* choice. Mr. Harris sends me a case every now and then, and, of course, you know, a man that gives as liberally to the church as he does is not to be insulted by having it sent back. And besides a man that has the great brain strain that I have by constant labors, it is great help to. I feel that it goes me good—keeps me up, so to speak, and if it wasn't for my semi-annual trips to Europe I feel certain that I would sink under the great strain."

"Poor fellow," murmured Valmond, underneath his breath.

"Well, of course," said Margery, "I don't suppose it would hurt you any, father, because you have perfect control over yourself, but I have seen men so drunk on champagne that they couldn't stand up." But Margery changed the subject quickly, thinking that she had gone a little too far. "You are so foolish, I think, to take so much pains with your sermons. Just preach pure, straight goodness and charity, and let the scientific part go,—and all the time fighting back at the skeptic must be very hard work. You know, father, that I am a little skeptic myself, and actually the more powerful your sermons are in defense of miracles the stronger you make me in the opposition."

"She is a thinker, then," said Valmond, underneath his breath.

But the Rev. Dr. Seymore was so used to the heresy of his daughter that her remarks produced no effect whatever upon him, for he added quickly :

"But I tell you, child, no other style of sermon will answer nowadays. Why, the leading magazines of the world fairly reek and teem with the rankest atheism,

and it is the absolute duty of the advanced preacher to keep abreast of the times. Why, a minister that don't do so isn't worth a thousand dollars a year. And a man must *live*, you know, even in the pulpit; and ten thousand a year, with the rectory, carriage and servants, and expenses to Europe twice a year, is not too much for a man who has brains enough to make the old faith palatable." And here the Rector placed his hand over his mouth and coughed. "Well, no, I don't mean that exactly. I mean — or should say — clearly understandable in such warlike times as these."

"Father," said Margery, slowly, "I am going to ask you a question, and I want you to answer me truly. Do you, or do you not, believe in your own heart that we exist in a conscious state after death?"

And Valmond saw the Rector start as though a pang had shot through him, and then saw him turn slowly toward his child and answer, gravely and solemnly: "Margery, you are my daughter, and for the first time in your life have grossly insulted me, for I am a Christian minister."

And Margery, coloring deeply, abruptly left the room, and the Rector sank back into his chair. In a few moments he felt a gentle hand around his neck, and soft, rosy lips upon his cheek.

"Forgive me, father. I will never approach the subject of religion to you again." And without another word she silently glided from the room.

"She is a great woman," said Valmond, as he arose from his cramped position and prepared to depart. "If I should be caught here they would think I was a vulgar burglar instead of a great martyr and civilizer of mankind."

Valmond descended to the second piazza and was about to continue to the ground, when he was attracted by the sudden turning up of the lights in one of the rooms in the second tier, and Valmond curiously creeping forward, and turning the Venetian blinds a trifle, peeped in.

It proved to be an elegantly appointed bath-room. The large porcelain tub sank into the floor, and was of sufficient size to swim in. At the foot stood two marble cupids. At the head an immense swan. Valmond's heart came into his throat as

the door opened and Margery entered, her feet sinking into the soft velvet carpet that completely covered the room.

She came directly towards the window, and had Valmond not been in his stocking feet, Margery surely must have heard him as he bounded back. She closed the blinds tightly and drew down the window.

"It is just as well," murmured Valmond, "for if I had remained I'd have been a cur. A naked woman, though, has no temptation for Valmond Benditti. *His mind is above the flesh.*"

But Valmond was deceiving himself, for there was another window, and after a sharp struggle he quietly crept towards it, gazing through a very narrow opening at the side. Margery turned on the water in an immense stream, which came with a roar from the mouth of the swan that stood so majestically at the head of the great sunken tank. Then as he saw Margery beginning to disrobe, Valmond turned away his head, saying bitterly: "I am a cur."

But in a moment something whispered in his ear, "Don't you know, man, that

women have wonderful power in getting themselves up for the street. You have an opportunity now of testing how much of this one is genuine and how much false," and Valmond stood listening to the voice of the tempter for what appeared to him an age. He must have one glance, if only for a second — and so he yielded.

And Valmond stood riveted to the spot — bewildered, paralyzed — for it was a perfect revelation to him that such a creature could exist. The divine goddess was standing in the center of the room; her hair that fell in easy, graceful waves over her superb bust reached below the waist, and there stood Margery in all her sublime womanhood, and ready to take the first plunge.

Valmond had read and studied so much of late years that he prided himself upon being a man of literary attainments. Valmond had visited art galleries, the study of sculpture with him becoming a mild passion. Valmond had posed as a model for a famous sculptor — and within two years — and the fact had been a secret delight to Valmond the Crank,

for he reasoned that his statue would be all ready for the Public Square when he became immortal.

The sculptor had evinced so much delight with Valmond's physical proportions that he had reverentially named him Adam, and as Valmond stood spell-bound before the grand transformation and revelation, he raised his hands in veneration and gasped:

"Well, if I am like unto Adam, that woman must surely be Eve."

But in a moment more he fled from the holy spectacle, and walking the floor of the little room all the night through, Valmond cried over and over again: "She is greater than the tempter of St. Anthony, but by the living Eternal she shall never turn me from my purpose!"



CHAPTER V.

Margery arose the next morning fresh as a daisy. Her bicycle was taken from the carriage-house. After a hasty breakfast, the air being so clear and bracing, she decided to take a run out into the country, and not make her customary trip through the Hollow until afternoon.

"I suppose," she reasoned as she flew over the level boulevard, "that I am very selfish, but the morning is so heavenly that I can not help it. I wonder how my dear Valmond is to-day?"

All nature seemed to be alive, and everybody was out — that is, everybody that was anybody. The birds sang joyfully. The horses' hoofs went clatter, clatter, clatter. Margery met elegantly-appointed vehicles, servants in shining livery, and she was kept continually bowing — nearly all being members of her father's congregation — the popular thoroughfare being alive with the *elite* of the great cathedral.

Margery's lightning-like pace had become slackened somewhat, as she was silently dreaming of her ideal perfect manhood, when she was interrupted in her reverie by —

"Good morning, Margery," and a pair of spirited and glossy bays, with the golden harness flashing in the sunlight, dashed up alongside.

"Good morning, brother," said Margery pleasantly, although Margery and her brother were never on the best of terms; but the oxygen in the air on this especial morning seemed to brace up everybody in the best of spirits. "You are out early for you."

"Yes; the air does me good," he replied, "and you are looking as fresh as a peach, Margery."

But the superb female bicyclist feeling fresher even than she looked, started forward with a well-sustained spirit, and the magnificent livery of her millionaire brother was in a short time left away — away behind.

Margery's brother, C. Wadsworth Seymore, had everything in this life to be thankful for, he being president of the

small branch Oligarchy Railroad, and authorized by law to charge six cents per mile, and which paid annual dividends of one hundred per cent, and C. Wadsworth Seymore, president, being the fortunate owner of over one-half the stock.

And the dashing Margery flew along and away out from the suburbs of the great city. She paused at a bridge that spanned a silver stream, fringed along, the shore with weeping willows, and just beyond and back a little from the grassy shore loomed up majestically immense and lordly elms.

"I must have a drink of that water, anyway," said Margery, as she stood her bicycle against the side of the bridge, and taking a little folding cup from her pocket, ran lightly down the embankment. After drinking several times from the crystal stream, Margery leaned back in blissful contentment and gazed around her. "I declare," she continued, "to folks inclined to be romantic, this spot is a perfect sylvan lovers' retreat."

After half an hour she arose and turned to retrace her steps, and directly in her

pathway, with his arms folded across his chest stood Valmond Benditti.

Now Margery did not start, or scream, or hesitate, but walking directly forward she extended her hand, and, with a pleased expression, said: "I am very glad to see you," but when the sturdy Valmond took her cordially extended hand, woman-like, Margery noticed the slightest perceptible tremble.

"The air was so bracing," said Valmond, "I thought I would close the shop and take a stroll in the country, and I think I am very fortunate in meeting you, for I was rude to you the other day,—and,—and,—I owe—you—an—apology."

"Oh, no; I guess you don't owe me anything," replied Margery, shaking her head and laughing, "and as I hardly like apologies, perhaps you had better say nothing more about it," and she looked at him in such a peculiar way that Valmond actually felt embarrassed.

And there they stood facing each other. Margery contemplating Valmond's blue flannel shirt, tied with a white silk handkerchief. His plain suit of dark grey, large flashing Italian eyes, and jet black

whiskers, carrying a heavy stick of hickory, that put Margery more in mind of an Indian war club than an ordinary walking cane.

And Valmond, as he stood there contemplating Margery in her tight-fitting bicycle suit, broad forehead, candid, honest eyes and health glowing cheeks, superbly rounded figure, which Valmond knew was perfectly natural from his transcendent experience and sight of the night before, and now Valmond began to seriously realize that his great and lofty ambition had received its first and only blow.

"I will bid you good morning," he said, lifting his hat politely, and using a much softer tone than Margery thought him capable of using, while she noticed the faintest and strangest pallor overspread his thoroughly masculine features. Then abruptly turning he sprang up the bank with the agility of an athlete, and started towards the city at the rate of six miles an hour.

"What a noble walk he has," said Margery, as she gazed admiringly after him, "and I think he likes me already. Men

such as he always like candid women, and I'll wager that he knows enough to grace a drawing-room if he chooses to let himself out; but how reserved he is."

Valmond having disappeared from view, Margery started on after, and at first she rode leisurely along. Then the speed was increased, and at last she was flying along like the wind. Valmond appeared in view. She would ride directly by. In a few moments more she spun past him like a race-horse. But, oh! how could such an unforeseen outrage occur, for in a second more she took a "header," and the bicycle flying one side of the road, and Margery turning two or three complete somersaults, landed most unromantically in the ditch.

Valmond sprang forward like a flash, and lifted her to her feet.

"Are you hurt?" he asked, and taking his white scarf from his neck, commenced to brush the sand and mud from her dress.

"Oh, no, not a bit," Margery replied making a strong effort to smile. "But, oh! dear, how provoking. I am such a perfect master of this machine, and to

think the only two 'headers' I have taken this year should be in your presence." Then Margery tried to correct the distressing blunder she had made, but of course was too late.

"Come," he said quickly, "sit down here by the roadside, and I will run to the city and get you a carriage."

"No, it will only make a scene, and I detest scenes. If you will kindly take care of my bicycle I will get along all right."

"Certainly," said Valmond, as he took hold of the bicycle with his left hand as though it was a toy, and wheeled it along. "Come," he said; "lean on me. This is no time for ceremony."

And Margery did not believe it was either, for she not only leaned her full weight upon him, but his right arm was placed around her waist, Valmond literally carrying her along.

"There, that will do," said Margery, softly and sweetly, the words passing through Valmond's body like an electric spark. "I will ride on my bicycle now if you will kindly assist me. I was only

a little stunned, and you have been very kind. I can not thank you enough."

As she rode away, Valmond kept behind until he saw Margery enter the carriage-house at the rectory.

"I guess," said Valmond as he entered his shop, "that she has more clear grit than any woman in the world, but d——her."

He took off his coat and went to work, a stormy sea of passions surging to and fro in his excited soul. But that night, remarkable to say, he toiled in the secret passage with more vim and energy than ever before, but cursing and swearing all the time.

CHAPTER VI.

About a year had passed, and one day Laura said to the Rev. Dr. Seymore:

"Yes, uncle, it is only too true; and now since you ask me outright, I will tell you Margery is passionately in love with the man — perfectly infatuated with him, and to tell the truth, I think she even thinks more of him than he does of her."

"Impossible," replied her uncle, starting up. "Why, in spite of Margery's blunt ways, she could have her pick of any of the wealthy young men in the cathedral."

"Of course she could, and I would not for the world have her know that I was informing you of her actions; but it is only for her own good I do it, of course, for Margery is too grand a girl to throw herself away on a mere mechanic."

"But I understand," said the Rector, slowly, "that the man is unusually intelligent for a man of his class."

"I know, I know, and there is scarcely

a day but something happens to her bicycle, or her little rifle. Why, the other day she got a bullet stuck in the barrel, and down she went to her handsome mechanic, and she was gone just two hours by the watch. Just think of it, uncle; two hours to put a piece of wire in a gun barrel and push the bullet out," here the Rector turned uneasily in his chair. "She ignores her fencing master altogether now, for she says Valmond, *Valmond* mind you, is a much better fencer," and here Laura lowered her voice, "and she goes down and fences with him regularly two or three times a week," and here she lowered her voice almost to a whisper, "and the people in the Cathedral are beginning to *talk* too—"

"Where is Margery now," asked the Rector as his brow clouded.

"Why, I declare here she comes now with her bicycle, something must have been the matter with it, and she has been to get it fixed again."

The Rector turned and touched the electric bell that connected with the carriage-house. Laura made a hasty exit,

and in a moment after Margery entered with her bold, easy, elastic step.

"Margery," said the Rector slowly, "Have I not been a kind and indulgent father to you, and humored you in everything since you were born? Have I not permitted you to run as wild as a wild flower—and as I have sown have I reaped?"

"Why, what do you mean?" cried Margery turning crimson.

"Well, I mean that your actions with this mechanic Valmond is making considerable talk among the members of the cathedral."

"I cannot imagine what my *actions* are, and I never go there unless I go for a purpose," and Margery indignantly walked to the door but paused suddenly on the threshold as she said spiritedly, "I care nothing for the opinion of any of the members of the cathedral; and why should I? The female portion has done nothing but snub me ever since I can remember; and another thing, I live in an entirely different world from what they do," and now Margery positively bristled as she added, "and I

can not point to a single person among the male portion who can approach in the faintest particular Valmond Benditti."

The Rector arose from his chair and commenced to wipe the perspiration from his forehead, "Well, even so, daughter, there is a vast difference between your station and his. Just stop and think of it for a moment,—horrible, horrible. Just to think of it, the daughter of a rector of the High Episcopal Church running after a mechanic—" and here the Rector took a nervous bound across the room as he said, "Why, its monstrous!"

"*Running after!*" almost screamed Margery as she turned pale and crimson at intervals, "I deny that I run after him, and as to his being only a *mechanic*, where will you find on the globe a nobler occupation than working in iron and steel!"

And the Rector sank exhausted back into his chair, as he continued to mop the nervous perspiration from his forehead. "Well, I know, I know, and while I don't admire the man—Oh, I have walked by his shop and seen him at work, and he always turns away his head when he sees me coming, and I don't believe he has

ever once entered the cathedral either, and living so near too, and while I don't admire the man I say — yet, if your heart is so completely set upon this Valmond — we are certainly under great obligation to him I admit — but for conscience sake keep away from his shop — and let him come here to the rectory and woo you like an honest man — and I will make his acquaintance, and try and reconcile myself to him — although it will be a great sacrifice for me to do so — (Margery's eyes were now beginning to flash) and perhaps I can use my influence with some of the millionaires of my congregation to get the man into some respectable occupation."

The seeming condescension of the father was received by Margery in an entirely different spirit from what the Rector expected, for she replied hotly.

"Valmond Bendetti is a man who asks no favors, and is perfectly competent to shift for himself, and besides I have asked him to call at this house time and time again, and he has always flatly refused!"

"Refused?" gasped the Rector.

"Yes, *refused*, and as I don't care to

continue this interview further, good morning," and his disobedient daughter swept from the room.

The Rector thought a moment, and as he pushed his unfinished sermon from him with a gesture of discouragement—said aloud. "Well, she is not a hypocrite at any rate, but I might have known it. What an enraged tigress it makes of a woman to come between her and the man of her choice, but thank God she's not a hypocrite."

Margery met Laura on the stairs, her willowy graceful form leaning over the banisters.

"Laura," said Margery, "You can be the Rev. Dr. Seymore's daughter after this."

"Why, what in the world do you mean?" asked Laura, bursting into tears.

"I mean," replied Margery, "that I have found you out."

"I am sure that I meant it all for your own good, dear," and Laura, seeing that present reconciliation was useless, went to her room to consult her prayer-book.

"Margery," called the Rector loudly.

"Well, sir?" said Margery, coolly upon entering his study.

The Rector paused a moment. He always prided himself upon being a thorough diplomat, for finally he said gravely —

"Go your own ways. You are twenty-five years of age, and your judgment should be good; I give you free rein. But remember, Margery, that whatever the outcome of this unnatural attachment may be, come to your father when you feel the need of a sterling friend, and now daughter go your own ways," then he gazed squarely in her face.

"I fail to comprehend your meaning sir," replied Margery as she haughtily left the room.

And the Rector hung his head and bit his lips.

* * * * *

But the work in the underground passage had continued night after night until now it terminated directly under the center of the great cathedral. Yet the ardor of Valmond had decreased to such a degree of late, that he had worked only about two hours each night, and now

that the ambition of years was accomplished, Valmond remained inactive and undecided. Has his passionate love for Margery unmanned him? Would he never become immortal, only settling down and marrying like any ordinary man? Would all the mighty evils of earth go on and on, just the same as though Valmond had never been created?

Yet no word of love had ever passed between Margery and himself. But scarcely a day passed that she was not at his shop, and when Margery failed to make her customary appearance Valmond was drawn like a magnet to where she was, and Margery never played the coquette with Valmond, for she thought she knew enough of the man she worshipped to know that such a course would be decidedly distasteful to what Margery considered the honest and blunt nature of Valmond.

One day Valmond had discovered the picture of Margery among the displayed samples outside of a great photographer's — and intuitively Valmond walked in and purchased one, and for a

week after this the secret passage was not entered.

On the evening of a day after he had been tortured with one of his severest mental battles, he sat down in his chair and tried to divert his mind by reading. But not one idea of the great Socialistic author entered Valmond's warlike brain. He takes Margery's picture from its hiding place and looks at it long and anxiously. He examines every detail, every outline, until his eyes become riveted upon it.

A violent thunder storm comes up. It increases in violence until a perfect tornado, goes shrieking and howling past. The lightning flashes zigzag through the intense blackness outside. But Valmond cared naught for the ravings and cursings of distressed nature, for the conflict in his own soul reiterated every throb of the terrible storm without, and Valmond, unable to bear the torture longer, leaped to his feet with a scream of frenzy, which only the blasphemings of nature prevented from being heard blocks away — and tearing the picture into a hundred pieces, Valmond rushed, without hat or

coat, out into the blinding storm, and ran on, and on, and on.

Valmond had left his shop-door standing open. In half an hour he returned, his violent and wild exercise having somewhat cooled his frenzied delirium. He enters the building, a strange light in his eye, and goes directly into his sleeping apartment, and pausing on the threshold, started back, for seated in his easy chair with her head towards him, sat Margery, piecing together the torn picture. She turned and bounded to her feet, saying hurriedly :

“ Oh, forgive me, forgive me ! I had been down to the sick Mrs. O'Brien's and was returning when the terrible storm came up ; I was standing under the awning a few doors down the street, when it blew away, and of course I had to seek shelter somewhere, and I saw the shop-door standing open and I came in ; I felt that you would be willing to allow me a moment's shelter, and — and I was so surprised at not seeing you — and the place all lighted up so — I was naturally curious — and how strange, my picture, too — Valmond — Mr. Benditti, I mean —

why, how wildly your eyes gleam. You are not in your right mind. Oh, Valmond, Valmond, let me go!" As he took both of her hands in his, and pushing her back closed the door and locked it.

At this moment the prophesy of her father flashed across Margery's mind, for her idol now appeared more like a wild animal than a man. She glanced at the bed, and, breaking away, bounded into a corner, and drawing a short dagger from her breast, said wildly :

"I must leave this place instantly, for if it was known that I had been here in your sleeping-room as late as nine o'clock and in the evening, too, I would be ruined forever. I know that I have been very indiscreet all through. Mercy, what a strange light there is in your eye! I demand, Valmond Benditti, that you open that door at once!"

"Not until you have heard me, madam, and you do me great wrong, for you are as safe here as you would be in your own father's house. Now listen to me; but first put down that toy you have in your hand," said Valmond with a terribly

indignant frown, and as the wild light disappeared from Valmond's eyes, Margery raised the window and threw the dagger out, and then, sinking into a chair and bursting into tears, said between her sobs:

"Oh, Valmond, Valmond, what is to become of us, and if you only knew how I suffer all the time. When, when, oh when are you going to break this horrible suspense and tell me that you love me!"

And Valmond did not clasp her to his heart and cover her with kisses, or fall at her feet, and Margery became suddenly chilly. What had she done. It seemed as though she would have given the earth to recall her words. But Margery did the next best thing, by rising to her feet, curling her proud lips to hide her crushed heart, and appearing marble.

And Valmond stood and looked at her as he said slowly:

"Margery, I never will *tell* you that I love you, for my great love for you has already nearly ruined me. There, do you see how my hand trembles. A year ago I was a man. What am I now? A purposeless imbecile. I had courage

enough for one thing, though. See! I have destroyed your picture!"

And Margery gazing a moment at the torn fragments, sprang towards him like a wounded Amazon.

"Well, how *dared* you then purchase my picture without first consulting me?" Then she laughed a little hysterically. "But I never gave it to you. So you have *not* insulted me in any way," and as she sank into her chair again the uncontrollable and mortifying tears rained down her cheeks,

But Valmond unlocked the door, and standing like a sentinel over the crushed and wounded woman, spoke not a word, and not a muscle of his face moving as she arose and came slowly towards him. The glance that Margery gave Valmond, as she passed, laid bare to him the agonized condition of her soul, and as Margery saw no mercy in his stolid features, she turned like a wounded panther and struck the great Valmond such a stinging blow in his face, with her gloved hand, that he fairly staggered against the wall—and then gathering her skirts

about her with the air of an empress she stalked boldly out into the black night.

And Valmond cursed and raved until early morning, for he loved Margery now more than ever.

CHAPTER VII.

And now comes the most remarkable part of this strange history, for Valmond conceived the idea that it was necessary to make the breach so wide between Margery and himself that it could not by any possibility be healed, for he was vain enough to imagine that Margery's love for him was of so strong a nature that should he give way to his longing instinct, and crave her forgiveness, that a reconciliation might take place.

Now his position Valmond considered a most perilous one. So reasoning and thinking, and thinking, his course became at last decided upon. Now Valmond knew all about Margery's brother, the millionaire, and president of the Oligarchy Railroad. Yes, he would force him to fight, and after C. Wadsworth Seymore had been swept from the face of the earth, Valmond would conceal himself in his secret passageway, and

then and there bring his great scheme to an end, sacrificing himself, of course. But his name—Valmond Benditti—would live forever.

So he decided to kill two birds with one stone. Now, C. Wadsworth Seymore, president of the Oligarchy Railroad, and son of the Rector of the great cathedral, and brother of Margery Seymore, had committed what to Valmond appeared an unpardonable sin. That is, he had done something for which the law could give no redress. An old and faithful employee of the road had been uncere- moniously discharged, and Valmond took it upon himself to search the man out and acquaint himself thoroughly with his grievances.

The millionaire stockholder and rail- road president was seated quietly in his private office when his secretary and chief clerk entered and stated that there was a man outside who wished to see him.

“Well, how many times, Mr. Holmes, have I politely requested that I be not disturbed with any of the complaints of the employees? Tell the man that he is

discharged, and that's all there is of it," said the president, as he turned to his work with an air that proved conclusively that further comment was unnecessary.

"But he is not an employee of the road," said Mr. Holmes timidly.

"Well, send him in then, but tell him I can only give him three minutes."

"My business may take more than three minutes," said Valmond upon entering, and there was an air about the new comer that caused the president to look up in a startled manner.

"But time is money," he said, "and at the end of three minutes you must excuse me," and President C. Wadsworth Seymour drew out his watch and curtly laid it on the table.

And Valmond's eyes flashed for a moment, but he said slowly, "Well, you had a man in your employ, a Mr. Robinson, and, as I understand, served you very faithfully, and has always worked for your best interest, I came in to see if something could not be done for him."

"Why, no; what *could* be done for him? The man is discharged and that's

all there is of it," and the president turned impatiently to his work.

"Why did you discharge him?"

The president dropped his pen and gazed up at the questioner with a bewildered look as though doubting his own senses. Why, *why*?"

"I said why," repeated Valmond.

"Why man you must be crazy to ask me a question like that. *Why*, indeed, and this interview is ended."

"Not quite," said Valmond, and as we have never met before, I now take pleasure in presenting to the great railroad magnate a decided curiosity — that is, the first man you have ever met in your life who dares to tell you the truth."

"Here, you get out of this office, you insulting vagabond!" and as the president turned to touch the bell Valmond coolly picked it up and put it in his pocket.

"Why, you are a robber, a highway-man," gasped the president as he stood spellbound.

And Valmond deliberately walked to the door, locked it and put the key in his pocket.

"Is this a plot to murder me?" gasped the president, trembling all over.

"No, sir; I only came in to give you a little advice, and if you dare to cry out until I get through I will place my hands upon your little effeminate neck, and choke your sneaking life out?"

"Great God, who are you?"

"Now, you miserable cur, don't you dare to speak as loud as that again," and Valmond's eyes blazed so, that the cold, clammy sweat stood in great beads all over the president's forehead. "Now this Robinson," went on Valmond, "was in the employ of your thieving railroad for twenty years. He had served as a factor to enrich you, and sent off as he was without a reason, his reputation is forever ruined, for he can secure employment upon no other road. If you steal that man's money you can be sent to jail, and that you know, you cowardly puppy—By God, you sit still, and don't you dare to get out of that chair! (and here the president wilted)—But if you steal his labor, you know you are safe, for the law of the land can not touch you. He has

no more protection than a fly in a spider's web."

"Well, I discharged him," ventured the president, with a wild, spasmodic gasp, "because he joined the Knights of Labor, for as soon as they get power enough they will eat us all up."

"You lie," said Valmond, "for they never can get power enough and because the poor man tried to protect himself and family, and when you know that he is helpless — you buy and sell his flesh and blood the same as you do cattle. Now, sit down, d—— you, for I'll be through in a moment, and I just wish to say that you are looked up to in this city as a man without a blemish, and your reputation in the cathedral is perfect. I allude now to that little den of hypocrites on the hill."

"Blasphemer!"

"I am telling the truth, and you know it, for does not your father up there preach exactly as he is told to?"

"Mercy!"

"And does he not run down only those evils that do not come in your latitude of crime. How long would he be preacher there if he had the courage to attack the

atrocities of high-toned criminals of your class, who are looked up to as ornaments of society. Yes, men like you who are supposed not to have a fault in the world but in reality are the bloodsuckers of a great proportion of the human race!"

"Great God, when are you going to get through?"

"When I get d—— good and ready. I've got you now where you have got all the employees of your dirty railroad."

"Well, you might at least tell me who you are?" shiveringly ventured the president.

"I am called a crank; that is all. I am one of those agitators of society who are never understood until they have been dead fifty or a hundred years."

"You are wrong about the cathedral, though," meekly said the president, "for it makes all the women and children better."

"Yes, but the good it does is more than overbalanced by giving an air of respectability to a class of vultures like you, who no preacher in the land dares to tell the truth to."

"I am not a vulture, sir," said the presi-

dent, for he now became convinced that the terrible man did not intend to murder him.

"Vulture is the exact word," said Valmond, "for you belong to that class who have the power and who do create an order of things in the world, so that a large class of men who are honest and industrious find it impossible to earn their living."

Now, Valmond's ferocity having given place to something of an argumentative nature and the president feeling his courage slowly returning, said, laughing icily, savagely and timidly, "I feel it is to my advantage, sir, to know you better, sir; kindly honor me with your name and address."

"I told you once that I am what the world calls a crank, but in generations to come will be looked upon as a god, and one destined to become immortal," a wild strange expression lighting up Valmond's entire face.

"Pshaw! I might have known it," reasoned the president. "Why, the man is crazy."

"Now, the probabilities are," said Val-

mond, "You will have me taken into custody, construing this interview into an assault. But if any man had forced himself upon me, as I have upon you, I would do nothing of the kind, but would prove myself a man by calling him out," and Valmond said this so rationally that he appeared to the president like anything but a crazy man, and hesitating a moment quietly said.

"I am not the cur, sir, you would make me out." Then drawing himself to his full height—ashamed and mortified at his recent cowardice said with a dignity that Valmond had no idea he possessed, "You need have no fear of the law, sir, until you hear from me, and you are at liberty, sir, to depart from this office without molestation."

Then Valmond replacing the bell upon the table, unlocking the door, and bowing with the extremest politeness, which to C. Wadsworth Seymore was the most incomprehensible thing yet done by the most incomprehensible man he had ever had the pleasure of meeting—the overbearing Valmond and self-styled crank departed.

Now President C. Wadsworth Seymore had never known of his sister's attachment for Valmond; in fact did not know that such a man existed. He had a family of his own, and he did not allow his brotherly interest in any way to interfere with his absorbing duties as president of the Oligarchy Railroad.

"Why, how can I challenge the blood-thirsty savage?" he exclaimed springing to his feet and walking excitedly up and down the office, "he has not left me his name and address," and in a moment a smile of satisfaction passed over the president's features. "Why, the idea of a warden in the church fighting a duel. Of course the fellow is crazy, and if he bothers me again I will have him sent either to prison or an asylum."

Then C. Wadsworth Seymore locked the door of his office, and walking the floor for an hour, finally laughed the matter off as a good joke. Then, calling his chief clerk, said:

"See that Robinson and the three others that were discharged last week be reinstated, and that their salaries are increased five per cent."

CHAPTER VIII.

At exactly half-past six that evening, a young messenger—to Valmond a perfect stranger—enters the shop hastily and hands him a letter, saying:

“I was told to wait for an answer.”

And Valmond, breaking the seal, read as follows:

TO VALMOND BENDITTI, Esq.:

MY DEAR SIR.—Inasmuch as you have grossly insulted, and without provocation, a gentleman of refinement and social standing, and one who holds in the community the respect and good-will of the entire city, and as you performed the dastardly outrage in the most cowardly manner—by entering his private office stealthily, and like a thief in the night—by turning the key—and then taking advantage of your superior strength heaped brutal imprecations upon his defenseless head—and understanding that you are both an experienced swordsman and dead pistol shot, and Mr.

Seymore, being a Christian gentleman, with no knowledge of either accomplishment, your action becomes so cowardly and detestable, that I take upon myself to demand of you instant redress. You having failed to leave your card at the time of the assault your courageous intentions in the matter becomes questionable—and unless you meet me within two hours from the receipt of this letter—at Sylvan grove—behind the great ice-house—you remain forever branded as a coward and overbearing brute.

(Signed)

“ZEROSKI,”

*Former Master-at-Arms to the Emperor
of Russia.*

And Valmond instantly entered his room and replied as follows:

To “ZEROSKI,” *Former Master-at-Arms
to the Emperor of Russia:*

RESPECTED SIR.—I will be at the place specified in exactly two hours. I shall bring no second or medical attendants. It will not be necessary, as I shall kill you dead. I will bring with me a pair of

superior rapiers which I trust will meet with your approval."

(Signed)

VALMOND BENDITTI,

Invincible Swordsman, and Champion of the Downtrodden and Afflicted of Earth, and Deadly Enemy of all Monopolies and Sanctuary Hypocrisy and Crank-in-Chief to the King of the Universe."

And Valmond sealing the note securely and simply addressing it to "Mr. Zerroski," asked the boy :

"What kind of a looking man sent you with the message?"

"It was not a man, sir, only a little boy. I have got to give the reply to him."

"Well, hurry with it," said Valmond.

"Strange," he mused, as he entered his room, "that challenge was never composed by a foreigner. I see it all now — why, it was made up by that sanctimonious monopolist, and copied by the man he has hired to run me through."

Now, as Valmond seated himself, his face assumed the utmost perplexity. By

calling the brother out and severely wounding him (he had never intended to kill *him*), and had reasoned that this would cause such an impassable barrier between Margery and himself—that a reconciliation would be impossible. For Valmond was conscious that he still loved the woman to desperation and fearful of course, that at any moment he was liable to throw himself at Margery's feet and beg forgiveness, and realizing that he would be forgiven in spite of her lacerated pride. And Valmond feeling and knowing that she still loved him, and so he decided to do something of so desperate a character they never could be anything to each other again.

But he had been defeated in his great plan, for the battle with the stranger would not only be of no advantage to him, but might be the means of wrecking his great ambition.

Now the wall of Valmond's room being decorated with swords of various lengths and weights—he took down one and tried it by striking a fencing attitude, and spinning the shining blade around and around in his hand. This was too

heavy—he must try another. The other was too light.

Then Valmond sat down and commenced to think. If he only knew whether this “Zeroski” was a tall, short or muscular man, then the selection of the weapons would be comparatively easy. For if the fencing-master was slightly built and physically weak, Valmond knew full well that it would be to his own advantage to bring upon the field as heavy a pair of swords as possible. If, on the other hand, the Russian was an immense, powerful fellow like himself, Valmond had sufficient faith in his own skill to know that the lighter the weapons the better.

“Of course I shall win anyway,” reasoned Valmond upon secondary consideration, “for I never have been defeated in anything I have ever undertaken, and never shall while I live;” and the thought that the law might interfere at the last moment, or in case he succeeded in killing the Russian, he might be overtaken by the law and sent to prison never once entered his now sturdy and self-complacent soul. But one thing continually

haunted him, and it was the fact that in some indefinable way the future influence of Margery might make him womanish and weak, and a thousand and one contradictory thoughts surging in his brain, Valmond selected a medium-weighted pair of swords and started to fight his useless battle.

"How strange," said Valmond, "to fight a duel in the night. I declare though," looking up, "why, the moon makes it as light as day."

And as Valmond was covered to his feet with a long cloak, the swords, of course, were easily concealed. He was soon out upon the country road. No one in sight, and feeling warm, Valmond paused to rest; and seating himself by the roadside threw back his cloak. Valmond leaned his head upon his hand and commenced to turn over in his mind the situation of affairs. A common knot-hole in the fence commanded his closest attention, for Valmond was reasoning out the exact manner in which he would kill the Russian.

In a moment he arose to his feet, and baring his arm commenced a skillful

thrusting at the hole — trying to pierce its exact center, and as he succeeded, a wild, savage gleam came into Valmond's eyes as he said :

“Take that you Russian hireling, and the moon you see gives sufficient light. Now, if there is life enough left in your miserable carcass — listen to my explanation — you see that I was not such a fool as to thrust at you *first*, but you see the moment you led out at me, I had you so — by countering — just under the line of your elbow, and like an idiot, you ran headlong on my ‘stopper,’ and so, you see, I am not guilty of your death.”

And Valmond, leaving his imaginary foe dead in the ditch, he hurried on to execute the fencing policy he had so effectively studied out. “It was so simple,” reasoned Valmond, that he was certain of success. In fact, he already had the Russian killed and thrown into the river. Now, one peculiarity about Valmond was, that no matter how blood-thirsty his aims, he was always so self-convinced of the purity of his intentions that anything like conscience or remorse was something that Valmond never experi-

enced. His only weakness he was willing to confess, was his passionate longing for Margery.

The moon passed behind a cloud. It became suddenly pitchy dark. Valmond by lighting a match looked at his watch. He started - - for the time for the meeting had expired, and Valmond could not by any possibility get to the dueling ground under ten minutes. What would the Russian think of him? Valmond hurried on. He arrived breathless at the rendezvous. The night remained dark as Egypt. He felt his way behind the ice-house. The spot he was familiar with, for Valmond knew full well the lordly trees, that grew upon the bank of the winding river—for had he not walked there many and many a time with Margery.

This spot by some was called the lovers' retreat, for oh, it was so romantically lovely—upon any time except a dark night. Now Valmond knew every step of the sylvan retreat—and while moving around among the great trees, a peculiar sensation passed through him—a sensa-

tion that the stolid Valmond had never experienced before —

“Perhaps,” he reasoned, “the Russian is lying in ambush, and will stab me in the back.”

With this comforting thought Valmond sat down upon a log and peered through the blackness around him, and he could just distinguish the dark somber outline of the giant oaks — as they were pictured against the hurrying clouds, that seemed to rush by — but no Russian or human being could be seen.

“My letter frightened him, he will not come,” said Valmond, as he arose and stalked around among the trees.

Then lighting a match looked again at his watch. Nearly an hour had passed and Valmond called aloud :

“Coward and braggadocia! Where are you? See, I have brought the finest Damascus blades. It will be a pleasure for any man to die by them.” And Valmond striking them together — the clear, ringing silvery sound seemed to chime, and chime,—to echo and re-echo,—then float away across the river and finally die among the distant hills.

But no answer.

The moon now rolled slowly out from behind the great cloud — clearly revealing a level emerald carpet — gently sloping down to the river bank — and the trees grew with such mathematical regularity, that the spaces between them were nearly all composed of squares of about twenty feet each.

“A natural dueling ground,” mused Valmond, “But the coward does not come;” and here a thought struck him. “Perhaps I may find the Russian further up the river.”

So Valmond started boldly forward. After several minutes of brisk walking, he came suddenly to a halt. Could he believe his senses? A small promontory, perfectly clear, and with no foliage upon it, jutting boldly out into the river, and about three hundred feet from where Valmond stood, and upon this promontory, standing rigid and motionless as a statue, was a man, with sword extended; and so perfect an artistic picture he appeared, that Valmond stood spell-bound in admiration. And the silvery moonlight revealed to Valmond the

easiest, most graceful, and formidable fencing attitude that Valmond in all his experience had ever seen.

And Valmond, standing for many minutes perfectly entranced, at last said aloud:

“Am I losing my reason I wonder?” But Valmond, in a moment more, pressed boldly forward. Then, in a moment more, he stopped. “Am I dreaming? Why does the man stand so motionless? Is the Russian a ghost I wonder?”

But as Valmond had the supremest contempt for anything that approached the supernatural—he fearlessly pressed forward.

There was an avenue of trees that led to the promontory, and through these Valmond passed and with a firm and warlike tread.

CHAPTER IX.

The specter never moved a muscle.

“You did not come upon your hour,” said Valmond when within twenty feet of the strange figure.

No reply.

Here Valmond saluted with his sword according to the most picturesque French school.

The Russian still remained motionless.

And Valmond came so near that he could almost touch the point of the stranger’s sword. But he instantly drew back—for it flashed through him, that the strange action of the Russian, was but a trick to run him through.

Then the Russian slowly lowered his weapon.

“Oh, I see you are alive,” and strange to say Valmond gave a sigh of relief.

And Valmond as he stood and looked upon him, saw a man a little below the medium height—with a heavy beard that fell a little below a black mask which

the Russian wore. He appeared to be thick set, and muscularly built, and was arrayed in an undress military coat.

"Do you prefer your own weapon?" asked Valmond.

The Russian bowed his head.

"Can you not speak?"

Now the Russian shook his head.

"Strange," said Valmond, "I wonder if I am dreaming?"

The strange acting man now took a note-book from his pocket, and writing for a few moments tore out the leaf, and sticking it upon the end of his sword thrust it out towards Valmond.

But Valmond sprang back, coming instantly to guard, as he said: "Oh, no; I am up to your foreign tricks."

Then the Russian laid the paper on the ground and retired twenty paces towards the river, and Valmond stepping forward picked it up and read:

"I am dumb. I can not speak. I knew you were here. I was waiting for the moon — useless to fight in the dark. I beat you here by half an hour. I have killed in a duel one man in every known nationality. You will be the first Amer-

ican. I am the best swordsman in the world and your time has come. I am hungry and thirsty to deposit your body in the river — so on guard at once,”

“One moment,” said Valmond, beginning to respect the remarkable acting individual. “Were you not engaged by C. Wadsworth Seymore to fight me?”

The Russian shook his head.

“I think you lie,” said Valmond slowly.

Now the Russian shook his head vindictively.

“I say you *lie*! for that challenge I received was never composed by a foreigner. It was thoroughly American in its style, and those lines that you have just written show the same style. You are a fraud of some kind, and no matter if you have the skill of all the forces of the orthodox hell and heaven combined I will kill you — come. We parley time. On guard!”

The swords were measured by touching the hilts, and both men instantly sprang back — so far that the points only were crossed.

“Hold!” said Valmond, “my rapier is half an inch longer than yours. I have

one of the same length. Will you try it?"

The Russian impatiently shook his head, as though anxious to begin, and the unusual battle for life and death commenced. Valmond saw at once that the alleged Russian was remarkably agile and a perfect fencer. His arm he held at full length, and Valmond realized at once that he had his match. For Valmond commenced by turning his fingers down—the width only of a lead pencil, to see if the Russian would be led into any such trap—but the Russian's arm remained as rigid and invincible as a piece of steel.

His antagonist's sword, Valmond saw, was nothing more than a long fencing foil—sharpened to a needle point—having a handle of unusual length, with a large balancing knob on the end of polished brass, that glistened in the moonlight.

As far as weapon was concerned the sturdy and invincible Russian had the decided advantage. For Valmond felt that his own sword was double the weight of his adversary's.

And Valmond engineering in every possible way to get an opening—and without success—decided at last to strike the Russian's blade a quick sharp blow, and owing to the superior thickness of his own—either disarm or shatter the slight and needle-like weapon of his opponent.

Like a flash of lightning Valmond struck at the sword of the Russian—a savage giant-like blow. At the same instant the Russian—as quick as a cat—lowered his point, and the superior strength of Valmond was completely baffled by the science of the intrepid Russian.

“You fence marvelously well,” said Valmond, as he paused a moment to wipe the perspiration from his forehead, and as they were about to renew the contest Valmond exclaimed hotly—“I demand that you remove that mask!”

But the Russian firmly shook his head and the fight commenced again.

“Now,” said he to himself, “I must hit him.”

But he made two or three sharp quick passes in rapid succession, and the Rus-

sian guarded Valmond's fierce onslaughts by simply moving his wrist in a circle, and so small was this circle that the point of the sword moved within a radius of a silver dollar, and the Russian countering each of Valmond's thrusts so adroitly, that Valmond came within an inch of being run through.

"It looks as though we will have to continue this another night," said Valmond.

The Russian paused, and writing a moment, tossed the line to Valmond. The moon rolled behind a heavy cloud, and Valmond, lighting a match, read —

"You are deceiving yourself; I have only been playing with you, and shall kill you now!"

The moon came out again and the swords were no sooner crossed than Valmond, leaping aside, and with a wild and savage yell, made an impetuous and headlong lunge at his antagonist. It was parried, but only with the greatest difficulty. Indeed, so close did the sword of Valmond come to the throat of the Russian that it pierced the collar of his military coat — and passing directly through — the hilt

striking the Russian so forcibly that he was hurled backward upon the ground.

His mask slipped partially off. Valmond caught a momentary view of the Russian's face. For the first time in his life Valmond gave a cry of consternation.

It was Margery.

He thought he had killed her.

Then without pausing an instant for reflection, he picked up the sword that had been thrown from Margery's hand in the fierce onslaught, and driving the hilt into the earth—and with the point directly towards him—leaped upon it. The sword passed completely through him—and Valmond rolled over on his side without a moan.

And Margery, strange to say, sprang forward with a cry of horror. She drew out the sword and threw it far out into the river, the other quickly followed it. Then kneeling down she placed her hand over Valmond's heart. There was a slight flutter. Then as Margery gazed up towards the moon, she said aloud :

"I think I am coming back to myself now, and oh God, how could I have been such a perfect fool!"

The situation was a terrible one. What was to be done — what *could* be done?

Instantly she decided. Margery ran all the way to the costumers. She paused at the door-step. It would never do to show excitement. The proprietor who was a Jew — opened the door —

“I will now change my dress,” said Margery with an effort at coolness. She was astonished at her success. “And here is the twenty-five dollars I promised you, besides the rental of the suit, and remember,” added Margery with a significant gesture, “that you have never seen me.”

And in less than ten minutes when ready to depart the warning was repeated.

“Never you fear,” replied the Jew — with a shrug of his shoulders — a wringing of his hands — and with his eyes half closed —

Margery’s plans, under the most exciting period of her life, matured with marvelous rapidity. It was sink or swim, and she knew it. She would make a desperate struggle for existence. Margery stopped before a small two-story building. It was a doctor’s office, and

her own cousin. She rang the night-bell, a voice answered through the tube. Margery recognized her cousin's voice.

"Dress, come down at once," said Margery in a very low tone.

"Mercy!" said Dr. Pardee, hurrying down. "Why, Margery! What is the matter?"

"Don't ask me. Hitch up your horse yourself, get lint and bandages, and come with me."

"But can't you say something; can't you explain!"

"I will on the way — no time for delay. It is a matter of life and death, I tell you. We may be too late."

And as her cousin turned and looked at Margery, he instantly obeyed the unusual summons.

Margery insisted that they should drive with the speed of the wind, and when half way there she turned to her cousin and said:

"You have always been a good friend to me, and you know I have a few thousand dollars in my own name, and if you will swear never to reveal this night's

business, and do all you can to help me — half of it is yours.”

“Why, of course I will, anything,” as he turned and looked at Margery in mute astonishment.

“You know Valmond, this eccentric mechanic?”

“Yes, I have — heard of — him,” replied the doctor slowly, as his countenance fell.

“Well, it will be better for me, I know, to be frank and candid from the start. In the first place — well, I confess it, I ran after the man; I was drawn towards him like a magnet. I can no more understand why than I can understand my own existence. If I don’t lay my heart bare before some one I shall go crazy,” and Margery, leaning her head forward upon the dashboard, wept and sobbed like a baby.

Her cousin turned savagely: “Well, he got you into trouble and then deserted you.”

“No!” replied Margery, starting up like a flash. “But if he dies, the disgrace and scandal will be so terrible, that I shall have to take my own life. There

is nothing else I can do. For I have done the most dreadful thing ever done by any woman, in any civilized country. The papers will flame with it for years, and all my relations will be disgraced forever," and here Margery burst into another violent flood of weeping.

"If the man dies," what do you mean by that?"

"Well, I will tell you about that in a moment. You see," she replied between her tears. "But you, a man, can not appreciate it, or know anything about it for you are not a woman — and you don't know what it means for a woman to be scorned—well, he scorned me one night—and you know what a terrible temper I have. Well, of course, I felt hurt, mortified and perfectly crushed. Yes, my pride was humbled by the man, and that is the most humiliating confession that any woman can possibly make, I know, and oh, how I hated him, I was fairly beside myself with passion, and I flew right at him and struck him a terrible blow in the face."

Here the carriage gave an awkward lurch, and Margery went on :

"I have not eaten, or slept any for two nights, and I know that I have not been in my right mind since I struck him. Well, yesterday, I saw him pass our house, and actually I followed after to renew the attack, when I saw him enter my brother's office. Valmond is a great Socialist, you know. Well, I followed him upstairs and slipped into a side room, and there overheard his entire conversation. Well, it was something terrible—all about a man that had been discharged, and it ended by his daring my brother to a duel. But of course Wadsworth is a man that would never do anything of that kind."

"Yes," said the doctor, "It would be a little odd for an elder in the church to fight a duel, and how would it be possible for a man in such a position to give any offence anyway. But I am all interest—proceed."

"Now there were two of us that Valmond had ground his heel upon within two days, and believe me, cousin, I was fairly drunk with rage and indignation, and I made a vow then and there, that I would kill him, and myself afterwards.

So what did I do but send a challenge to him, in a masculine hand, and signing my name as a Russian fencing master. Then I disguised myself as a man, and the unheard of thing was done—and

“And you got the best of him?”

“Oh, no, he came within an ace of killing me. My mask fell off just as he thought he had killed me, and when he saw who I was what did the noble fellow do—” and now Margery burst into another violent flood of weeping.

“Noble lunatic,” said the doctor, “I know all about him. Well—well—”

“Well, he took my sword and ran it right through his own body,—and oh my God, I am afraid Valmond is dead!” and Margery commenced wringing her hands and sobbing hysterically.

“You’re *afraid* he’s dead? Well, Margery, I haven’t a bit of patience with you. Well, here we are, we must be near the spot now. Come, I will tie the horse here.”

Then they both got out of the carriage, and Margery standing like a statue refused to go forward.

“And if he is dead?” she said dream-

ingly, "Why, cousin, I think I am going crazy."

The doctor turned quickly. "Here, take this powder," as he saw her lean heavily against a tree, and placing his arm around Margery's waist he literally poured it down her throat.

She revived, and the doctor taking his lantern they both moved slowly forward, Margery a trifle in advance. Suddenly the doctor heard the heartrending cry —

"Oh, Valmond, Valmond!"

And the next moment he saw Margery fall insensible upon a dark body.

Instantly he ran to the river and returning threw a hat full of cold water in her face.

"Come, this is no time for fainting. The man is not dead. See he moves."

"Not dead?" cried Margery starting up.

"No, all depends now on your firmness. We will get him in the carriage. I will let you out at the suburbs. Be sure and go home at once and *stay* there, and draw your veil closely over your face. Leave all the rest to me. It must not get in the papers. It's a desperate case, I

know, but I told you I would see you out in the matter, and I will."

They raised Valmond to his feet. He opened his eyes, gazing around with a bewildered stare.

"Why, Margery," he said, "I thought I had killed you."

"Why, see," said her cousin, "he's all right, for he can walk."

When Margery entered her home she was met in the hallway by her father.

"I saw you go out early last evening," he said, "and it is now three o'clock in the morning." There was a pause. "Do you need me as a friend now, or do you not?"

"Why should I?" was all Margery replied.

"Do you deny that you have not been with this Valmond?"

No reply to this. There was a painful pause as father and daughter stood facing each other.

"Go to your room," he commanded, "and to-morrow, wanton, I think you had better pack up and go to him altogether."

Margery turned upon her father like a flash of lightning —

“I will leave your roof to night and forever, for by God, Mr. Seymore, you **LIE!**”

The Rector staggered against the wall, but when he turned to call his daughter she was gone.

CHAPTER X.

And Margery, boiling over with rage and mortification at the inhuman name her father had called her, went directly to a hotel to rest as well as she could, vowing inwardly that she would never darken his door again.

She arose early, and going at once to her cousin, the doctor, and with a face white as death, simply said:

“Well?”

“I think he will pull through, for he is a very strong man. He refused to go to the hospital, and I have him now safely in his own home. He said if he had really hurt you in any way he ought to be slowly roasted to death in his own forge.”

“Why, can he really talk as well as that?” said Margery, as her face brightened up, “but I must go now; and cousin, how can I ever pay you,” and in another moment Margery was gone.

“As sure as I am born,” said the doctor,

gazing down the street after Margery's retreating form, "she will be with the rascal in less than ten minutes. I have heard of women being smitten with men, but this lays over any case I ever heard of. She is a noble girl, but these cases generally end one way. Of course, when the vagabond gets well he will seduce her. But I suppose it would be as much as my life is worth to interfere," and the doctor with a sigh entered his office.

Margery walked quickly down the street. Suddenly she was seized from behind, and before Margery had time to think or resist—found herself in a closed carriage—face to face with her father. Two men sprang in after her, and her father said soothingly—as the carriage rolled away.

"Come, daughter, I was hasty. Come home with me, that's a good girl."

"It takes three men then, does it, to capture one woman?" replied Margery as she sank back into her seat—her eyes fairly ablaze with indignation. But in a moment more Margery folded her arms—apparently perfectly resigned.

Not another word was spoken until

the rectory was reached. The two men alighted first — one standing upon each side of the carriage door. And Margery reasoning now — that discretion was the better part of valor — moved directly up the steps, and arriving at the top struck a most picturesque attitude as she clinched her beautiful white hands — and speaking with withering scorn.

“The idea of an Episcopal clergyman being seen in front of his own house with two detestable Pinkerton hirelings.”

But Margery’s scorn was entirely thrown away, for the Pinkerton men were two lilies of the force, each having served long terms in State prison, and of course familiar to the most radical sarcasm of their former prison persecutors.

But Margery did not remain to notice the effect of her shot, but bolted directly to her room and locked the door in her father’s face.

“Margery!” he said, “open that door at once.”

No answer.

“I wish to apologize for my conduct early this morning.”

No answer.

The Rector, with a sigh, left for his study, and sinking into a chair, cried out: "Oh my God, my God, what have I ever done to be punished like this? Well," added the Rector resignedly, "the girl is the product of my bringing up, I suppose, and that is all there is about it."

Laura enters the room and throws her arms about her uncle's neck and commences to cry. "I see," she said, "You have got her back."

"Go up to the room, Laura," he said, "and see if you can not reconcile her to us," while the tears rained down his cheeks he added slowly, "Train up a child in the way she should go, and when she is old she will not depart from it."

Laura went up and knocked at Margery's door —

"It is I, Laura, and let me in. Won't you, dear?"

The door was opened.

"I do not think you mean well by me, Laura, but we won't talk about that. Bring me up a cup of tea, and some toast, and do the servants know about it?"

"Not a word," replied Laura.

It was now ten o'clock in the morning, and after Margery had eaten a light lunch she said:

"I will lie down now. Come up and wake me at supper time."

"I wonder," thought the discriminating Laura as she went down stairs, "why she wishes to be woke up at supper time? She was out all night, and probably with her handsome mechanic, and won't this thing just make a sensation when it comes out."

And Margery laid down on the bed. She did not lock her door. And while Margery was laying her plans to see Valmond she sank into a heavy slumber.

At ten o'clock that night both Laura and the Rector entered the room on tiptoe. She was still sleeping.

"Do not disturb her," said her father, "she will sleep till morning." They passed quietly out, the Rector locking the door from the outside and putting the key in his pocket, and then retiring, fell into a troubled doze. "I thank God her mother isn't alive," murmured the Rector, "for Margery's actions would kill her." Then he sank into a heavy sleep.

But Laura did not retire at all—for she had a novel of absorbing interest, and perhaps she reasoned. “It might keep her up all night.”

But how provoking — Laura started from her chair by the falling of the book. She looked at her watch. Gracious! four o’clock. She had slept in her easy chair nearly the entire night. In a moment Laura slipped off her dainty crimson slippers, and like a mouse crept towards Margery’s room, and listening at the keyhole, with breathless suspense, and at last becoming convinced that all was safe within—crept as silently back again.

But Laura’s sagacity had been completely baffled by Margery, for her father and herself had no sooner left the room, locking the door after them, than Margery bounded from the bed and said:

“Yes, they have locked me in. Just exactly what I expected they would do. And now Valmond, if it costs me my life, I will come to you.”

After two hours the city was as quiet as a sepulchre. She went to the window and gazed down towards the Hollow. A dim light was burning in Valmond’s

window. Margery imagined it was beckoning her on. She knew that Valmond was a strong Socialist. But had she known that nearly underneath her feet, and at that moment, was stowed sufficient dynamite to blow not only the rectory, but the great cathedral into atoms — would her ardent passion for the anarchist still hold out?

It is yet to be seen how strong was Margery's love.

She took all her jewels from her box, as well as two five-hundred-dollar United States bonds. They would come very good, as Margery never intended to return to her father's house. Her next movement was to cut the bedclothes into strips, and tying them strongly together a serviceable rope was secured. Then she raised the window carefully and looked out. A policeman was passing. He paused and looked up. In a moment more he moved methodically along on his beat.

When out of sight, Margery quietly lowered herself by the rope, firmly tying the end to the bed-post. A perilous attempt, for Margery reasoned that the

house might at that moment be watched. We know Margery, for a woman, was far from being a coward, but yet she trembled at the great risk she was running.

"If interfered with I must defend myself," said Margery, as she pocketed a small revolver—one that she used to practice at the mark. "How I hate those Pinkerton men," she murmured, "for they are such miserable sneaks and cowards, and just to think of ex-convicts being set to interfere with honest folks," and then Margery set her beautiful lips firmly together as she added, "They had better be careful that's all I say, for I am a desperate woman to-night!"

Then Margery peered carefully up and down the street, and when satisfied that all was clear—commenced her perilous descent. Her room was in the third story. When half-way down she felt the support snap—

"I am lost," she gasped, closing her eyes, but no, only a strand or two had broken. Margery continued her descent as quickly as possible. In a moment more the rope gave way. She landed with a jar—but squarely upon her feet.

"I must have fallen ten feet," said Margery, looking up.

"More like fifteen," said a voice at her side, "but you are a brave girl, and I am sorry to detain you."

"Who are you?" demanded Margery turning quickly.

"No matter. It looks very suspicious to see a young lady making her exit in such a peculiar way, and in the night, too. And I consider it my duty to detain you, that is all."

"You were not hired, then, to watch the house?" as Margery quietly slipped her hand into her pocket.

"Oh, no; but then —"

"But then you *git*," said Margery like a flash, as she thrust the revolver point blank into his face, and the officious individual turned on his heel and ran down the street like the wind.

"Desperate cases require desperate remedies," said our adventurous young lady, as she turned and moved rapidly in the direction of Valmond's shop, which she reached without further mishap, and going to the side of the building—looked in at Valmond's window.

He was propped up with pillows and asleep. His face was pale, and he was apparently breathing heavily. The student lamp was turned low, and stood upon a table drawn near the bed, and right at his hand there were the glasses and medicines. Margery could see plainly as the opening in the side of the curtain was quite broad.

"He is well cared for," said Margery, "but what a horrible thing for a man in his condition to be left alone, and in the night — without an attendant."

And Margery venturing a light tap upon the window, and observing Valmond slowly open his eyes — her heart commenced a violent knocking against her ribs. But regaining courage she knocked still louder, as she said appealingly —

"Valmond, Valmond, it is I, Margery, I come to inquire for your health, that is all."

"Touch the spring upon the right side of the sash, and you can raise the window," he said just loud enough for her to hear.

She did as directed, and raised the window.

"Do not hesitate or you will be discovered."

"Oh, I dare not, Valmond, I dare not, I only came to —"

"I will take cold, the night is chilly."

Margery now sprang quickly through the window, securely closing it, and drawing down the shade, so that no one could see in from the outside.

"Come and draw a chair up beside the bed," he said, "If I believed in angels, I should call this an angel's visit. Give me your hand Margery, and oh, what a terrible battle we had."

"But I was so crushed at the way you talked to me the other night. I tell you Valmond, I did not care to live — and oh, forgive me Valmond, but I followed you and overheard the conversation you had with my brother — and I was not myself Valmond; I was not myself."

But Margery knew full well that all through their association that Valmond loved her — and she also knew that Valmond, for some unknown reason, was struggling against that love and trying to conquer it. At first she became indignant, but her own love having grown so

impetuous and unconquerable, she felt that he must at last succumb and be her own—and now as she gazed into his great eyes—something of a deeper humanity than she had ever observed before—seemed to be lingering there.

“Margery,” he said, “fix my pillow—my position is strained.”

And the headstrong girl, masculine but beautiful, performed the operation with so much softness, gentleness and love, that the vision of the invincible Russian duelist was never associated with Margery again. And the part of Valmond’s strange nature that was rebellious and brutal was this night, at least, conquered by that part of him that was thoroughly human.

And Margery, a wild and strange creature, stood at the head of the bed, stroking with a loving hand the pale forehead of the prostrated lion. He raised his arm and drew her head down to his—and for the first time their lips met in a long and loving kiss.

“Margery,” said Valmond, “I never dreamed that you would conquer me, but

you have. You have baffled though the greatest scheme of earth."

"What is it you mean, Valmond? I have suspected for a long time that you held some terrible secret. Can you not confide in me now—in me—Margery?" and as she wound her arms about his neck and placed her warm cheek against his own, she felt the hot tears coursing down Valmond's face.

"Some other time—perhaps," was all he said.

And Margery urged him no further, and at three o'clock she arose to go.

"Valmond," she said, "I have left my father's roof forever, and I will come and see you again to-morrow night," and in a moment more Margery had stealthily departed.

And Valmond kissing her shadow, fell in a heavy slumber, and when he awoke his strength seemed to have suddenly returned to him, and with his strength—came thundering back—the old ambition.

"What fools these mortals be."

CHAPTER XI.

All search for Margery having been in vain, the Rev. Dr. Seymore had to swallow his mortification, and bear his grief as best he could. The gossips' tongues were at last loosened, and the story that Margery had gone to visit relatives out of the city was no longer credited.

"There is one favorable thing about the horrible affair—this Valmond is still here." Then the Rector bounded to his feet. "I will go and see him this very morning, I feel that he will tell me the truth."

It was about a week after the strange affair in which Valmond had been hurt, and the Rector came in hurriedly—

"I heard that you had met with an accident, and I am glad to see you looking so well."

Valmond he found sitting up in his chair—out in his shop—ready to take any orders that might come along—for

he expected to be well enough for work in a day or two.

"I am obliged to you," was all the reply that Valmond made.

"Well, I will come to the point at once. My daughter, has left my house," and the Rector eyed Valmond very earnestly —

"Well, yes — that is, I saw in a paper that she was visiting friends out of the city."

"Of course, of course; but can *you* give me any information in regard to her?" asked the Rector, dropping his eyes and twirling his thumbs nervously.

"No, sir; I can not," replied Valmond frankly, "for I know no more of her whereabouts, than you do."

"Very well, that is all," said Dr. Seymour, as he abruptly took his departure.

A few days after this brief interview, of the Rector's, Valmond was excitedly pacing up and down his little room — beating his head with his fists — and grinding his teeth —

"By God," he said fiercely, "She has not been here now in three nights, and what could have become of her?" No

matter, d—— her, I have been a weak-minded fool long enough, and the cathedral goes up to-night, and then I will be out of this agony of suspense!”

He glanced hastily at the time—nine o'clock. Valmond realized that he must do it, before the impulse had time to cool, so literally springing to the shop door, and closing it with a bang—he tried to lock it, and when hammering wildly away at it—there came a hasty rap from the outside—

“By God, it is Margery!” gasped Valmond, as the door was made fast.

But no matter, he turned like the wind, and leaping into the cellar—paused suddenly at the sight of the battery, and commenced to think as rationally as he could, then after a moment.

“No, I *must* see the woman *once* more. But to-morrow night at this hour the cathedral goes.”

Now Valmond must have been a crank of an unusual order, for instantly, all his fierce manner seemed to leave him, for he coolly walked up and opened the shop door, and sure enough there stood Margery.

"Come inside," he said.

"No, Valmond," she replied hesitatingly, you are up now, and it would hardly be right — I only come to inquire after your health — and —

"Come in, come in," said Valmond anxiously.

"Oh, I can not, Valmond, I can not."

"But you must, you must," and taking Margery by the arm he drew her inside and closed the door.

"Come in my room," he urged.

"Why, it will be nicer out here," she replied, and taking a chair, Margery sank into it.

The light was reflected from Valmond's study and bedroom in such a manner, that it fell full on Margery's face, and Valmond suddenly became bewitched, for she had never appeared so radiantly beautiful before. He drew a chair up close beside her, and taking both her hands in his, gazed into her face long and earnestly —

"What is troubling you, Valmond?" she asked, in a soft, silvery voice.

"Nothing." Then there was a long pause. "But how dazzlingly beautiful

you are to-night." This he said — followed by a heavy sigh — "but these chairs are uncomfortable out here; come in the other room, you shall have my easy-chair, and be my queen; and you are the object I was trying to kill! Great God! But come, I am going — and don't you see I am weak and need assistance?" as he moved away.

Margery arose, taking him gently by the arm as he led the way.

"There," he said, the rapture growing stronger and stronger all the time, "you *are* my queen and a great one, too."

"No, no," she said with a soft, pretty smile. "I will not accept the chair, for you are not strong yet," and as she pushed Valmond gently into it, and at the same time seating herself upon an ottoman and looking up into Valmond's face, and as Valmond gazed down into her superb eyes and at her rosy, warm lips, he asked hoarsely :

"May I?"

Their eyes were riveted together, but after a moment Margery drew away as she answered, "No; you were wounded and helpless when I kissed you before —

but now," and drawing still further away she took a book from the table, and running over the leaves, said carelessly, "I see you read all the great books; and what do you think of 'Looking Backward?'"

"Not much," he replied, the old-fashioned light coming into his eyes, as was always the case when any subject relating to his favorite theme — socialism — was approached.

"Well, I think it is wonderful," said Margery, as she dropped her eyes.

"Well, I do not," said Valmond vindictively, "for the raving imbecile who wrote this 'Looking Backward,' seems to think that there will come a time on this devilish earth when the strong will not eat up the weak, and as I understand it, that is the sum and substance of the whole thing."

"Why, Valmond, how can you talk that way — for you are strong and I am weak, and you do not eat me up," and the way that Margery looked up in his face drove all his combative ideas out of his head, and fairly made his blood tingle.

And the thought came stealing softly into Valmond's head — it was night, and

they were alone — and the stronger he tried to drive the demon away the more formidable the demon became.

“Margery,” he at last said, “you are not weak,—but oh, will you not permit me to kiss you just once?”

But Margery turned away her head, and taking a magazine from the table, began to run over the pages, while Valmond glared down longingly at her.

“How well the literary critic in this magazine speaks of all the books he reviews,” said Margery, archly and evasively, with her eyes still fixed in the book.

“And no wonder,” said Valmond impatiently, “for that is what the literary critic is paid for, and he don’t dare to do anything else,—because, you see, all the books lied about in that magazine are published by the same publishing company as the magazine itself. But when that magazine receives for review any books from any other publisher or from individuals, it is the business of the literary critic of that magazine to — well, to pulverize them, irrespective of merit.”

“I am afraid, Valmond, you are some-

thing of a cynic," said Margery, with her eyes still down.

"Cynic or no cynic," said Valmond moving in his chair nervously, "but the fact is generally known by every one, that the book critics, as a class, are a lot of starved-to-death authors,—who have failed in their calling, and they always condemn everything until they are paid to speak well of it, and they are not generally to blame either,—for it is the only means the poor devils have of keeping out of the poor-house."

"Well, it is a wicked, wicked world, and no mistake," said Margery, with her eyes still down, but when she raised them and looked into his face the idea of the "book critic" instantly took its flight, and a thrill of ecstasy passed through Valmond — such as he had never experienced before, and throwing his arms around Margery — he attempted to fold her head to his heart.

"No, no, don't," she said. Remember it is night and we are alone, and we are not — married —

"Come, come," he asked excitedly, "will you marry me to-night."

No, no ; not to-night, Valmond.

"But when, *when?*" he cried — his immense eyes fairly blazing.

"Oh, some time, Valmond — but not to-night, Valmond, and oh, Valmond, don't, *don't* press me so hard. There, there darling, you may kiss me just once," and Valmond clasping her passionately in his great arms, imprinted kiss after kiss, on her peach-like lips — and at last their mouths becoming sealed together — and in his excitement attempted to rise from the chair — with Margery still in his arms —

"Oh, Valmond, Valmond, what are you trying to do? and you will strain your wound, and oh, God, Valmond don't press me so hard," but the superbly rounded burden, was too much for the wounded Valmond, for the next moment he sank exhausted back into the chair — saying —

"I was going to walk with my darling that is all, the same as I would with a baby. For I love you so, Margery — that I think I am losing my reason — and I have sworn time and time again, that no woman should ever turn my head."

"There I must go now," said Margery gently — and at the same time trying to release herself from his frantic grasp. "I have only half an hour to catch the train, come Valmond, darling, I must go."

"Yes, and I must go with you, for you shall marry me to-night — wound or no wound," and quickly arising attempted to put on his coat.

"No," said Margery firmly, "for you are in no condition, and you might get a relapse. No, no, Valmond, really you had better not go."

Valmond paused suddenly in the act of putting on his coat, as he asked quickly, "Why were you not here for three nights, and why do you not tell me of your whereabouts?"

"Why, Valmond, *why*?"

"Yes, *why*?" he demanded almost savagely. "Perhaps there is a reason you do not wish me to know your location."

"Why, the only reason I have in not telling you where I am stopping is, that should anyone inquire of my whereabouts you could not tell them — that is all."

But the jealous monster had already

entered Valmond's soul, for he asked passionately :

"You are sure there is not another man somewhere? Remember, you have left your father's house."

This was Margery's first punishing blow. Then the terrible word, wanton, that her father had hurled at her in his anger, the night she left his house, now for the first time came thundering back in her ears, with redoubled effectiveness, and Margery simply sank back in a chair and commenced to weep — and Valmond stood and looked at her — the jealous flame growing brighter and brighter every additional moment.

"I thought so," he said, "and that is the reason you refuse to marry me to-night?"

"There is no other man, Valmond, but I can not marry you now."

"Very well," he said hotly. "Then it will never be — for I have been a fool, and, to tell the truth, I don't believe in marriages anyway."

"Nor do I!" said Margery, bounding to her feet, and the eyes of the impetuous girl began to flash like diamonds.

"Now be calm a moment," said Valmond, "and I will tell you as rationally as I can why *I* do not believe in marriages. In the first place they are a curse — and

"Marriage is *not* a curse," interrupted Margery spiritedly, "for when people who are not *cranks* are united (oh, you confessed you were a crank when you replied to my challenge),—yes, *cranks*, I say—who don't know their own mind one moment—and —"

"Cranks?" echoed Valmond.

"Yes, or men who are built physically like — you — or Samson — but—who in reality are little weak children — and if they can not have their immediate desires gratified are babies in their souls."

"You mistake me, madam."

"I do not mistake you. I did not mistake you to-night — and there is something higher in marriage, especially to a woman, than the mere gratification of the animal passions. I did *not* mistake you, Valmond Benditti,—for every girl of fifteen can read a man's perfect soul in the expression of his eyes — even better than he can read himself —"

“Well, if you have not read mine before—”

“But I have,” interrupted Margery.

“Very well, continue to read it, then, through my speech, for you have saved me to-night,—and I will now tell why I do not believe in marriages—for we were both in great danger—”

“*One* was in danger, the other was not,” said Margery, as she drew her little silver revolver from her pocket and then put it back again.

But Valmond pretended not to notice the radical way in which Margery would have defended her honor, even against the man she had professed to love,—for Valmond proceeded with his lesson almost savagely.

“If the confounded marriages would only stop, then all the evils of the human race would stop, and of course the race die out,—and men like me, whom the world calls cranks, would not be necessary. How many people do you suppose there are in this world who are glad they were ever born?”

“I, for one,” said Margery flatly, “even if I am an outcast.”

“Well, your testimony is not worth much—for you have never had to struggle for your existence, and never will. Now don’t interrupt me Margery—for that is the chief stand I have always taken against the church—that is, that it encourages marriages—and so sin and suffering are continually coming into the world.”

Here Margery shook her head impatiently.

But Valmond went on more earnestly than before—with that strange wild light in his eyes Margery had noticed so many times before—

“Yes, now look at the Catholic church, and the stand it takes in regard to marriage. Do you pretend to say that the Romish church is not responsible—for at least a quarter of all the wretched misery—the poverty and the squalid filth—in the thickly tenanted houses—in the large cities—where a man, who is not capable of taking care of himself even, is commanded to bring children into the world like rabbits—many of them to literally starve to death—and become little angels—perhaps. But we

all *know* what happens to them here; and then look at your father's cathedral on the hill, overlooking the Hollow with all its suffering and how much good does it do in proportion to the vast amount of money invested in it."

"Well, one thing it does do, and I speak from my own experience. It was the early teaching I received there, that makes me as strong as a lion—in the hour of temptation—for a female who is healthy and well—I think I make myself understood, Mr. Benditti," and as Margery arose to her full height she appeared to Valmond regal in her superb womanhood.

Then Margery turned haughtily away, and was almost as far as the shop door—when Valmond ran after her—and intercepting her passage to the street—cried out—

"Oh, Margery, Margery, don't, don't leave me!"

"But, I must," she said calmly, "and what is the use of our acquaintance continuing when we only quarrel all the time?"

“But, I love you, I can not live without you,” and throwing himself at her feet, he kissed her hands passionately.

CHAPTER XII.

"Come, come, Valmond," she said, "you are beside yourself, and if you *must* kiss something, why, kiss my lips."

He took her at her word instantly, and Margery allowed herself to be led into his room again, and Valmond, clasping her in his arms, sank into the easy chair and commenced to rock her to and fro.

"Oh Margery," he said, as he rocked her back and forth, "I am human, I am human, although at times I think I was born for an avenging brute."

"Valmond," she whispered so softly in his ear, "I can not tell why you are the only man I ever could love, for you are very blunt at times,—and there is that about you that most women would fear. But I do not fear you, Valmond. No, no, I do not fear your fierce ways. You remember the time you saved my life, Valmond, and I think I know now, Valmond, why, oh why, I love you so dearly, it is because you do not know the name

of fear, my Valmond, oh my Valmond!" and as he continued to rock her back and forth Margery continued to pour words of musical endearment into Valmond's ear—with her soft warm cheek against his own—the subterranean passage for once entirely out of Valmond's captivated mind.

"Come," he said more gently than he had ever spoken before, "prove to me that I am the only one in your affections by remaining here to-night."

And Margery replied very, very gently, "No, no, darling, you must not, oh you must not, suggest such a thing to me again,—for remember how we quarreled before."

And Valmond's voice was now as soft and soothing as the woman he loved. "Come, you must, you will, occupy the bed, while I will lie on the mat outside the door. No harm shall come to my angel, for I will guard you like a lion."

But Margery made no reply, and when her head drooped Valmond attempted to rise with her, and place her on the bed—and her soft warm lips, which lay on Valmond's neck, moved faintly.

"No — you will — strain — your wound, and Valmond my darling — we — will — remain — as — we — are —

"Very well," breathed Valmond, oh, so softly and humanly, "I will rock you 'til morning — so close your eyes again my love and my own."

Valmond had become transformed, such tones had never come from his heart before, and as Margery lay in his arms, his entire being was changed into a tranquility — such as he had never experienced.

Will Margery finally conquer his avenging instincts?

"Oh, I had forgotten," she said dreamingly as the lamp burned low, "I had quite forgotten your wound, and to think that we should have quarreled so, when we love one another, oh, so dearly. You will always shield me in your strong arms, will you not Valmond, my great love?"

"Forever and forever my angel," and Valmond said what he meant at that time — in the silence — and the night.

And you who read these lines, know it is so with all of us — both young and old

alike. The warm sunshine—the thunder storm and shrieking tornado—and then we all know the twilight will come—and after that our eyes will close in the ecstasy of death—and the end will be—the darkness or—the morning.

Could Margery have known what lay behind her few short hours of happiness, her brave soul would have become chilled and congealed with horror.

“She is at last asleep,” breathed Valmond, and with that he raised Margery in his arms and carrying her to the bed (in spite of his wound), as though she was a baby and gently laid her upon it.

And there stood Valmond gazing down upon her in the dim light, and stood as a statue, and at last his word of honor—that he would lie upon the mat crept silently into his soul. How beautiful she was, how warm—how lovely. Would she object if he lay beside her? Margery was dressed for the street—all except her long disguising cloak. And as he stood there anxiously watching her—the battle in his soul commenced in earnest. Her lips were parted, her perfectly rounded bosom rising and falling, and

her sweet-scented breath, and lovely rosy lips caused the angry battle in Valmond's turbulent soul to rise higher and higher—and Margery at last turning uneasily in her sleep—said with so much womanly longing—

“Oh Valmond, Valmond, my love and my own—why don't you come to me?”

It was then that the climax came, for Valmond bounding forward clasped her in his arms—and Margery murmuring and half asleep—

“Oh, no, you must not. Oh, my darling, remember it is night, and we are alone—oh, God, what is to become of us?” as she still clung around his neck. “No, *no*, in God's name NO—or we are lost!”

Then for the twentieth time the cruel word of her father came thundering in her ear—and in a moment was wide awake, and pushing Valmond violently from her—Margery sprang out upon the floor—as she said indignantly:

“You told me you would lie upon the mat; you have not kept your word Valmond—and you are not a man of honor.”

"Great God, a man of honor?" almost screamed Valmond. "How can a man battle against the law of his being, and resist the drawing of a cable?"

"Well, *I* can," said Margery, "and that is just the difference between people who are brought up under the despised religious teachings of the day and those who are not."

"Retire Margery, for I have nothing further to say. You have cured me," and as Valmond stretched himself upon the mat the great beads of perspiration stood all over his forehead.

And there lay Valmond, hour after hour — tossing and tossing.

"Yes," he murmured, "and this is what I saved her from the river for — to grow up and be a torture to me — to play with me as a cat would a mouse — to draw me like a miller around a flame — to cover my soul with the most agonizing delight, and then withhold me like a child — to drag the honor from my ambitious soul — take it from me — trample upon it — and, oh God," he added between his teeth, "I curse you Margery — but I do not stand

alone, for I believe that every great ambition has its Margery."

Then, as he arose from his bed, he passed out into his shop, and taking up a small bar of steel, moved directly but stealthily towards the bed on which Margery was lying.

But it was not to kill her — not even to harm her. She was asleep and breathing softly, and Valmond drawing near, kissed her as he would a marble statue.

"Good-by forever, woman," he said, "for I shall never marry you. And I admit you were strong enough to save us both from a worse fate, and from us at least no offspring will ever come forth to add another branch to the populating curses of mankind."

Then Valmond moved towards the trap that led to the cellar, and quietly raising it, turned for an instant and looked towards the bed. Margery did not stir. Then he leaped down — his awful purpose fully matured.

In half an hour the mighty cathedral would be leveled to the earth, and Valmond Benditti's name would live for-

ever upon the pages of history. So Valmond reasoned, for the woman had not conquered him.

* * * * *

Margery awoke, and rising from the bed, looked towards the mat. He was not there. She turned up the light and walked fearlessly out into the shop, but started upon hearing a dull, heavy sound like the rumbling of a distant earthquake.

"He was crushed and mortified, I know, at the firm stand I took, but he will love me all the better for it now. Valmond, Valmond," she called "Why, what has become of you?"

Then Margery searched every place in the shop,—but of course to no avail,—and when re-entering the little room a certain part of the floor seemed to crack and creak beneath her feet, and, stooping down, Margery discovered the door,—and using all her strength she lifted it up and gazed anxiously down into the darkness.

"Could he have descended here, I wonder, and for what? May be something has happened to him." And not being able to stand the latter idea, Mar-

gery lighted a small lantern, and holding it down as far as she could, called out :

“Valmond, Valmond, let us be friends.”

No reply.

And Margery discovering the small ladder at the side descended into the cellar.

“How strange,” murmured Margery as she discovered the opening in the side of the wall, “why, I declare it is an underground passageway—I must see where it leads. Perhaps Valmond has gone up this way”—and taking the lantern, and holding it above her head and well out in front, she fearlessly entered the subterranean passage. And after advancing about a hundred feet she stopped and called :

“Valmond, Valmond. It is I, Margery !”

And an echo—strange, ominous and deathly—seemed to reverberate and reverberate—for miles in front.

“I must return,” said Margery aloud, and at the same instant she felt a violent blow upon the forehead that staggered her,—and hearing something flutter at her feet—she held down the lantern, and discovering a large bat, Margery

soon realized that the passage was alive with them.

"Great God!" she said, "why, this is the most terrible place in the world. I wonder what it can be for?"

As Margery stood there thinking she heard a faint cry, and listening intently it came again,—and Margery feeling certain it was Valmond's voice—she paused not an instant—but pressed heroically on. Then she saw a gleam of light—and after stumbling forward the intrepid woman discovered that the light formed an irregular triangle—and hurrying forward—came to the conclusion that the end of the passage was close at hand. But where was Valmond? And what was that triangular-shaped light upon the wall?

The spot was reached—and Margery discovered that a large rock had fallen from above—and blocked the way—and the light she saw came creeping through the opening around the great mass. Presently she heard a voice, that made her heart bound for joy—

"Margery how did you find the way—and why did you follow me?"

"I missed you Valmond, and you know I can not live without you. Forgive, forgive me, Valmond—but what are you doing in this awful place? Tell me, Valmond, tell me what it all means?"

"I am here to die," he replied, "for the passage is stopped and I can not get out. The rock fell just as I passed this spot. It came near crushing me."

"Crushing you, great God!" exclaimed Margery, "and the falling of the rock must have been the strange sound I heard awhile ago. But you are in no danger, darling, for I will go and get a crowd of laborers to dig you out."

"No," he said excitedly, "you must bring no one—for not a creature in the world knows of this passage except myself."

"What?" exclaimed Margery in alarm.

"Go back to the cellar and bring a pick you will find there, I have a rifle here, and through this opening I will kill any one you bring with you—so beware!"

And while Margery is gone it will be necessary to explain, that while Valmond was on his way to examine the dynamite under the cathedral—to see that all was

in working order, the rock had fallen, thereby preventing him from exploding the battery. The battery was near the cellar, and would be set off from there. Now near this battery Valmond had placed a heavy revolver. And at the moment of the stupendous explosion, Valmond had decided to blow his own brains out.

He had reasoned that if taken alive they would not put him in prison, they would not hang him, they would not shoot him: but an infuriated populace would rend him limb from limb—a populace who were not at the present time far enough advanced in the knowledge of the hypocrisy of the great cathedral and its encouragement of villainous marriages, which by its issues helped along suffering, sin and death—a populace, he reasoned, that could not understand at the present time that the moral code of the future must war against marriages, and also against using the house of God as a commercial agency.

Valmond believed that they would find his body at once, or very shortly after the earthquakian explosion had taken place;

so he had prepared an exhaustive letter explaining the reason for his unprecedented act, and having plainly addressed it to the "Associated Press of the World," kept it at all times sewed up in the inside pocket of his coat, the end of the parchment protruding in such a manner that it could not by any possibility escape notice.

The passage, of course, was cold and damp, but when Margery returned the perspiration ran in streams down her cheeks.

"There darling," she said, "I think you can get the pick through that opening. It is quite a squeeze though — and see, I have brought a spade, too, and remember if it were not for me you'd have been buried alive in there. So you see I hold a claim upon you, and as it is 'leap year' I shall insist upon our being married within a week — after we get out of this awful place."

And Valmond, uttering determined curses, not loud but deep, and more firm in his terrible resolution than ever, dug on; while Margery, with joy and thanksgiving in her heart, worked along with

such a will that within half an hour an opening large enough for Valmond to crawl through was completed. So Valmond and Margery sat down side by side and rested—Valmond never uttering a word. At last Margery spoke a little impatiently to break the silence:

“I declare I begin to feel like a regular explorer. How far does this strange passage extend?”

“Oh, five or six hundred feet.”

“Well, I am all curiosity. Take me to the end; will you, Valmond, darling?” as she pressed up close to him.

Dark, cold, weird and damp was the inhuman place,—but Valmond was used to it. And had Margery raised her lantern and looked in Valmond’s face she would have seen a storm there,—that was no comparison to the sepulchral-like passage.

“No!” he replied firmly, almost savagely, “I have something to do.”

“Oh,” said Margery injuredly as she threw her arms about his neck, “forgive me, darling, oh forgive me, I did not think of your wound. And just to think of your great exertion. Why, it is a wonder

that it did not kill you,— and how selfish of me to let you work at all; I could easily have dug the hole through. You know how strong I am — my great one.”

But Valmond made no reply, sitting there like a statue, with his chin resting upon his massive chest. And as Margery raised her eyes to his she saw such a gleam of wildness in his piercing eyes that she recoiled in amazement. But in a moment more the impetuous girl threw herself bodily upon his breast, and, winding her arms about his neck, said wildly:

“Oh, Valmond, Valmond, Valmond! you are not angry with me because I would not play the wanton with you—are you, darling? How could you ever respect and love me after that? For Valmond, I prize you, and your opinion of me, above the riches of the earth. Oh, Valmond, Valmond, if that is the price I must pay to secure your love, what is to become of us?”

The man Margery idolized still remained a statue.

But Margery would move him. “Oh, Valmond, Valmond, I love you, wildly,

frantically, and I must be your true and loyal wife or nothing—Valmond, my love and my all. This place is the dreariest of earth—and yet with you here by my side—it is all radiant sunshine.”

And winding her arms about his neck—convulsively she kissed his eyes—his forehead—his mouth and his neck—until Valmond bounding to his feet, cried out in the dark cavern—his stentorian voice echoing and re-echoing along the weird archway—

“Margery, Margery, my love for you, has made a wild, raving maniac of me, and the only way I can *prove* my love is to KILL you!”

And Margery saw such an inhuman and paralyzing expression about the entire face of Valmond—that she threw up her arms in terror, and fell fainting upon the dark and damp soil of the unearthly sepulcher.

CHAPTER XIII.

When Margery awoke to consciousness, she realized at once that her lover had not executed his insane threat,—for Valmond was bending over her,—the wild inhuman glare entirely gone from his eye, and in its place there appeared a mild—and what to Margery seemed almost a saintly expression in the soft kindness, that had taken the place of all the cruel savagery.

“Valmond,” she said, “am I already dead—and are you dead to—and have we both become sanctified—and are we in another world?”

“No,” replied Valmond sadly, “you have been dreaming. You fainted and you have a bruise upon your forehead. It has gone down now. I bathed it with arnica.”

“Then you will not kill me, will you, darling?” and as she sank back and closed her eyes, she continued dreamingly. But if you wish to kill,—me—why—you—may.”

"There is your breakfast upon the table. I brought it in for you." And as Margery arose from the bed — Valmond pulled back the shade, and the warm, golden sunlight came in through the lattice.

"I am your prisoner, then," said Margery, "You will not even release me long enough for my meals," and she looked both pleased and angered.

"I think," said Valmond, slowly, "you had better not be seen out in the daytime. I am afraid some one will steal you from me."

"No one can steal me from you Valmond, and my father will not molest me now, I know; and if he should, why I am of age, you know, and he can not detain me according to the law, and I intend to go boldly up to the house to-day and get my bicycle and take a ride; I don't care for the cathedral people, and whether they recognize me or not is a matter of total indifference to me. And I know a nice quiet boarding-house where I can stop until — until — well, until we are married," and sitting down commenced to eat her breakfast.

"Margery," he said, "I am not hungry but will sit down and drink a cup of coffee — with you."

And after Margery had finished her meal, she arose, and going to the glass and arranging her toilet slightly and putting on her hat, she threw her arms around Valmond's neck, and as she kissed him two or three times, oh, so affectionately, said:

"Close up the shop and don't work any more, for the present at least. I have money enough all in my own name, and I have a thousand dollars on my person now, in United States bonds, so good-by, dear, I will be back in an hour. You are looking pale and agitated, but remember after to-day we live apart until we are married. Good-by, dearest," and Margery, laying her warm cheek against his and kissing him again, turned towards the door.

"Margery," said Valmond firmly, "you can not go."

"Can not?" echoed Margery.

"*Can not!*" he repeated sternly, some of the old strange light entering his eyes.

"Why love, what is the matter? You

ought not to keep me cooped up here—I will be back to you in an hour.”

“Margery,” he said, “you think you know Valmond Benditti—but you do not. You can not leave this house simply because—you have seen the great passage.”

“But surely, and of course it is a great mystery—and if I should tell you that I would not mention it—could you not believe Margery.”

“Yes, I would believe you, of course—but there may be those who would attempt to force the secret from you.”

“Very well, then,” said Margery resignedly, sinking into a chair, “I will do as you say—but you know Valmond, dear, that I have always been used to plenty of fresh air—and my experience last night was certainly horrible, and I should like to go out in the sunshine ever so much; but Valmond certainly if you are going to keep me here a prisoner, you ought to send someone here to marry us, right away. Think how it looks, and I am sure I have never had reason to accuse you of unfairness.”

At the noble appeal of the magnificent

specimen of womanhood before him Valmond's nature, which in the last few moments had been slowly drifting back to its fierce condition now began to relapse again into its milder form—for he said—

"It is *not* unreasonable for me to expect you to make a sacrifice for the man—you pretend to love."

"Very well, then," replied Margery calmly, "I will prove that I *do* love you, by doing as you wish in all things."

"In—all—things," said Valmond slowly.

"Yes, all things except one," and the fire began slowly to gather in Margery's splendid eyes.

"I have a greater sacrifice to ask of you than the one you allude to."

"*Greater?*" and Margery looked up bewildered.

"Come with me," said Valmond, and leading the way into the cellar—he pointed to the battery and said:

'You say you love me, and I wish you to prove it.'

Margery simply stood and looked at him.

"Did it ever occur to you Margery, that I am the foremost man on the globe to-day."

"You are the foremost man to me." said Margery.

"You see this battery," and Valmond folded his arms across his great chest; "well, by touching that spring there, it will explode a mass of dynamite which lies directly under the cathedral. A sufficient quantity to blow it into atoms."

The cellar was dimly lighted, from the trap above—and as Valmond turned and looked at Margery—he saw the brave girl trembling from head to foot—every particle of color having left her face.

A sound came from above.

Valmond sprang up through the trap. It closed behind him suddenly.

Margery recognized the fact that she was a prisoner, and leaning against the dark wall—sank upon her knees—and for the first time in years prayed aloud—

"Oh God, my God! I have always doubted your existence. But if there *be* a God, Oh Christ, intercede now for me; help me and save me, and I will live in the future nearer Thee. Amen."

In a moment more Margery arose to her feet, and folding her arms across her breast leaned resignedly against the wall and said:

"Whatever is to come — no matter now."

The trap opened from above, and Valmond leaped down —

"Only a customer," he said, "I have closed the place up, and sent him away, I will never have use for the shop again or your money. I will prove to you now that I am the greatest man on the earth. For I am the only man ever born, who has the courage to BLOW UP THE CHURCH OF GOD."

But Valmond was thunderstruck at the calmness with which Margery received the startling intelligence.

"But why should you blow it up?" she simply asked.

"Because it has grown to be an inactive humbug. The proof of which is,—the leading minds of the world, and the most conscientious people, won't have anything to do with it. For the good that it does is overbalanced, two to one, by the fraud and hypocrisy that it shields."

"Valmond," said Margery slowly, "I always knew that you were a Socialist, and an enthusiast upon the great questions of the day—but I never thought that your *insanity* would carry you so far. Then you dug this immense trench yourself?"

"Yes, all alone!" replied Valmond with a broad, heroic gesture.

At this moment Margery's feet struck something. She glanced downward, and in the dim light saw that it was a revolver. In its use she was an expert. Inwardly she prayed constantly, and remained perfectly calm. Margery was nearest the battery,—while Valmond stood upon the opposite side of the cellar.

"Come," said Margery quietly, "I don't think this is such a horrible thing after all. Let us talk calmly about it," as she edged nearer and nearer to the revolver, "and when do you intend to touch off the battery?"

"I did intend to do it last night. I came down for that purpose, and the big rock and your presence prevented me, as it did for the twentieth time. And the sacrifice I expect of you is to die here

with me. I will not even consult you,—for woman, you have stood between me and the liberation of the human race for the last, and the cathedral goes up NOW!” and Valmond, with a wild cry, jumped for the battery.

Instantly Margery snatched up the revolver—and held it full in his face—her eyes glittering like diamonds.

“Hear me just one moment!” she screamed, “only one moment! In the name of CHRIST! Fifteen years ago you saved my life. You are a brave man and I worship you, and for you I have unsexed myself, and as my father said, ‘ran after you’” (and here Valmond made a move towards her) “stop where you are until I am done! Now, you even went so far as to reject a love that was thrown at your feet; I will be candid—My brother is a man I do not like; I did not challenge, and in my frenzy, try to kill you, for his sake at all, for you told him the truth. Can you not be patient?” as Valmond made another move forward but was actually withheld by the determined woman’s blazing eyes.

“I challenged you,” she went on,

“because you trampled on my love, my pride — I am a female tigress after all — and as this is a matter of life and death, a little rehearsal will not do any hurt.”

“I will wait but thirty seconds more!” cried Valmond like a maniac.

Valmond heard the hammer of the revolver go click-click, while the muzzle was held directly on his forehead.

And Margery continued speaking like a flash of lightning: “I have remained here underneath your roof all night when not married to you, and if known — whether innocent or guilty — I would be ruined forever. You know yourself that we have been in the closest possible relations that human beings can be in and not fall — I have done for you what I would not do for any living man — and why you have captured my entire soul and body I do not know — and I love you at this moment as no woman ever loved a man. But by the living God, Valmond Benditti, if you dare to approach this battery I will shoot you DEAD!”

CHAPTER XIV.

Now Valmond had no objections to dying. In fact death was a part of his immortal scheme—and as he saw in the determined girl's eye that she would certainly carry out her threat—and then of course the battery would never be set off—so he said quickly—

“Come, come, Margery, we will defer the matter—for a while at least—and the fact is, I have made up my mind not to do it at all.”

“Are you telling me the truth?” asked Margery half doubtfully—as she slowly lowered the revolver.

“I will prove it to you by returning up the ladder,” and, suiting the action to the word, Valmond sprang up to the floor above.

But Margery did not budge. She stood as if in a determined dream.

“Come up here Margery I wish to talk to you. I give you my word of honor—that I will not attempt to spring the battery.”

But it was only with a slow, and hesitating step that Margery came up from the cellar.

"Don't be afraid," he said, "give me the revolver."

And Margery placing the weapon upon the mantel *behind* her—fell at his feet and clasping him around the knees cried out:

"Oh, Valmond, Valmond, my love and my all—how did such a wild idea ever enter your head? What good would it do?" and Margery clung so convulsively to him, that she could hardly speak.

"Why it would draw the attention of the world to the fact—that the day of the usefulness of the church—in its present form had gone by—and over the ashes of the cathedral—would be reared a building for *practical* philanthropy alone. And you know Margery yourself that that great curse of the day—namely "monopolies" by which millions and millions of human beings are ensalved—the cathedral encourages, rather than checks."

Margery had arisen to her feet, with her mind still upon the revolver. "Well

you may be right about that," she said slowly.

"Of course I am, for what do preachers say everywhere to the poor man — be a slave and continue to be so while you live — because it is Christ like, to be gentle and meek, and allow yourself to be imposed upon. And the millionaire says to the preacher: "That's right," and he puts his hand in his pocket, and gives an additional five hundred dollars to the church — and the millionaire goes home and blesses the righteousness of the church with all his might."

Margery made no reply at all, but kept thinking of the revolver, while her eye every now and then wandered near the trap door, that led to the cellar where the terrible machine was located.

Then came a painful silence, and at last Margery broke it. "But you said you would not do it," she said, fixing her eyes steadfastly upon Valmond — who was now quietly seated in a chair.

At last he spoke, "The first thing that a good business man does — when he comes to the city is to join the cathedral and of course gets lots of trade at once."

"Yes," replied Margery quickly, "and he has to pay well for his hypocrisy too—for in order to sustain his position in the cathedral he must give liberally to all charities."

But Valmond spoke again half to Margery and half to himself. "But in my great letter to the world I have suggested that any building they rear in place of the old one—should have about it at least an outside semblance of integrity within, by having painted on the front an immense sign, "This is a Charitable Commercial Agency."

"I don't see," said Margery spiritedly, "why you should make these excuses for your stupendous crime—when you have given up the idea."

"Well, I have given it up."

But Margery worked her chair nearer the mantel—as he edged *his* chair nearer the trap door, reasoning that he must get possession of the revolver.

"Margery," he said slowly, "I tell you the truth when I say that I will not blow up the cathedral," and a pale, indefinable gleam came into Valmond's eye as he continued, "Now, in my great letter to

the world, I have written some very startling facts that would carry conviction wherever read," and the strange light in Valmond's eye grew stronger and stronger as he proceeded, "the clergymen in all churches get a much better living than the majority of their congregation."

"That is true," said Margery as she edged a little nearer the mantel, and Valmond edged a little nearer the trap-door.

Then Valmond said, "I know they send lots of tracts down in the Hollow, when what they need most there is bread."

"That's very true," said Margery, "and that just puts me in mind, since I have given up the cathedral, and my father's house, I haven't thought much about the Hollow. I must—" but she did not finish, she only arose to shake her dress out a little, but when Margery sat down again, was very careful to shove her chair a trifle nearer the mantel. And Valmond was equally careful to edge his a little nearer the trap door.

"There is more selfishness in the cathedral than out of it, and more goodness and human kindness down in the Hollow than on the Hill. For I saw one

night in the Hollow a poor Irish woman nursing a little black baby, who had just lost its mother. Is there any one on the Hill that would do that?"

Margery gave a perceptible shudder as she replied, "No, but there are a great many ladies who would be touched with pity and hire some one else to do it."

"And if they had no money, what then?" asked Valmond as he cast a strange glance at the revolver.

"Why," replied Margery hesitatingly, "if they were as poor and ignorant as the Irish woman — well, they would probably do just as she did," continued Margery, with a weird and trembling sort of smile.

But Valmond rested his head upon his hand, as he said almost with a groan, "and this cursed theology almost makes a man doubt the blessings of annihilation."

Margery's heart now gave a bound as she asked earnestly: "Now, Valmond, if by any possibility there should be a judgment after death, and we really do exist in another life — what do you think your punishment will be for the horrible thing you are contemplating?"

Valmond instantly sprung to his feet with a wild yell.

"There will be no punishment at all, for for all time to come, I will be God's right-hand man, for Valmond Benditti has been the special agent he has been looking for for centuries!"

"Great God, he is crazy!" she gasped, as the cold perspiration stood in great drops all over the brave girl's face, but leaping instantly to her feet and snatching the revolver, and pointing it directly at his head, she said with the same authority she had once heard a keeper in a menagerie address a wild beast: "Valmond Benditti, if you do not back instantly out into the street, I will surely kill you!"

And Valmond quickly retreated, but when half way to the door he suddenly stopped, and the pale, strange light in his eyes almost instantly vanished, and Margery saw her Valmond standing before her, apparently as 'sane a man as ever lived, as he said in the most soothing tones imaginable:

"Why, Margery, you have forgotten that I told you I would not do it." Then

there was a pause for fully half a minute as they stood facing each other. At last Valmond stretched out his arms to her. "Come, Margery, come; throw your arms about my neck and kiss me."

The sudden change in Valmond's condition caused Margery to lower the weapon, and her eyes meeting his, in another moment she let the revolver fall to the floor and sprang to his breast, and the nervous strain which the grand girl had been subjected to suddenly collapsed, for Margery Seymore burst into a violent and hysterical fit of weeping.

And Valmond having now become his more human self again, actually lifted Margery in his arms and carrying her into the back room, sank with his burden into the easy-chair, and commenced rocking her to and fro—until after her terrible excitement—she fell into an anxious sleep.

"I have her now under control," reasoned Valmond, and although Margery dreamingly opened her eyes—she failed to observe that the pale inhuman glare was gathering again in Valmond's great expressive eyes. But she fell asleep

again, and when after an hour she awoke Valmond was glaring down upon her.

"You know Margery," he said, "that I told you I would not set off the battery — and I told you the truth — but I have decided that you must do it *yourself*."

And Margery started up with a wild startled cry — as there was no mistaking the terrible earnestness in Valmond's set features.

"Yes, you must do it," he said slowly and decidedly, "for when the explosion takes place I have something to do myself. Come here," he continued rising and pointing out of the window. "You see that remnant of an old building — part way up the hill and off at one side."

"I see it," said Margery in so husky a tone, that her voice was scarcely audible, Then suddenly glancing around for the revolver — saw to her consternation that it was gone.

"Well," he said and with his teeth set, "you see those old timbers standing alone that form a perfect cross,"

"Yes," she replied in a whisper — while

the clammy beads of horror settled all over her forehead.

"Well, you say you *love* me, and if you love me you will do my bidding. What is human life in comparison to great and lofty principles? And why should not our names at least become immortal?" Then as his voice became soft again—and his eye kindly—Margery took courage, and winding her arms about his neck supplicated—

"Oh, Valmond, Valmond, Valmond, what is it you mean? What *is* it you mean? And why was I ever created to love you? For God knows I do it not of my own accord, for I do not *want* to love you,—for my love for you has become only a cruel, indefinable torture. Why did you rescue me from the river? Oh Christ, why did you not let me drown? Are we all insane, Valmond, are we all insane?"

"Our lives at best, Margery, are only an insane dream, and I, for acknowledging it, am the only sane man upon the earth."

"But what is it you would have me do, Valmond? What is it you would have

me do?" she cried clinging wildly to him.

And Valmond commenced very calmly: "There is likely to be a thunderstorm during the night. Let us watch, and when we see the gathering clouds, and when the storm is about to burst in all its fury I will go out upon the hill," and here Valmond's voice sank into a low unearthly whisper, "I shall expect you to go into the cellar and touch the battery,—and at the same moment you must rush out upon the hill,—and immediately after the explosion I will climb up the cross,—and I shall expect you to drive spikes into my feet and hands—in other words—crucify me—that all the world may see Valmond the Infidel, who is no more afraid to die for a principle than his counterpart was eighteen hundred years ago, and whose teachings are no longer practiced by His alleged upholders."

And Margery stood riveted to the spot—and simply glared upon him—through a period of several seconds. At last she gasped out:

"Monster!" and as she shrank back,

covered her face with her hands. "Great God!" she went on wildly, "let me out of this place, or I shall be as crazy a maniac as you! Great God, let me out, I say!" and Margery rushed towards the door, struggling and screaming.

"Silence, woman!" demanded Valmond, as he placed his hand firmly over her mouth. "You say you love me, and I have proved to you that you do not," and as Valmond made no further attempt to detain her, Margery recovered somewhat as she said:

"Yes, yes; but there is no human being on earth would do what you demand. No, not one!"

And Margery became somewhat pacified — when she thought, why it is only a horrid dream of course. I shall wake soon—for this is not my Valmond—only an insane devil—who has come to torture me. Every one has a devil I suppose—and I wonder if I am really going crazy too? as she drew her hand painfully across her forehead.

Then she saw Valmond turn and go deliberately into the back room—and

sinking into his chair — place his head upon his hands — and groan aloud.

And Margery stood and looked at him, free to escape if she chose to. To summon the police, and have her insane lover placed in custody, where he could do no harm. But he was meek as a child now, and Margery became chilly, when she began to realize that in spite of all — her old love was actually returning. Should she go for help? But while she was gone, another fit might seize him, and he, in desperation, might instantly touch the battery. So Margery silently drew near him. His head still rested upon his hands — and he was groaning aloud.

“I will prove my love,” said Margery, “by keeping near him — come what may. Valmond dear,” she whispered gently in his ear, and spread her hands upon his forehead — and kissed his pale cold lips, “it is I, Margery, who loves you, and I know you will not exact from me what you asked — for that would be so cruel to your Margery — that loves you, oh, so dearly — so very, very dearly.”

And Margery now saw that the great

lion, was entirely under her control, for Valmond leaned his head down into her lap, and cried like a little child.

"Oh Margery," he said, "what does it all mean? Why was I created to carry this awful burden; think that I was something more than an ordinary man, and born to reform the world, when I can not even reform myself? When I can not withstand temptation — when left here alone in the night with you, I was as weak as any man. I believe now that I have more faults than all of the cathedral people combined. Why was I created to think that I was the greatest man on earth — when I am nothing but a worm?" then, raising his head, cried imploringly to her: "Margery, Margery! stay by me; don't leave me, for the foul fiend will be after me again," and bounding to his feet, walked rapidly up and down the room.

"Believe me, oh, believe me, Valmond, I will never leave you."

"But, Margery," he cried wildly, "you are the greatest woman on earth, and you must stay by me constantly," as he clasped her in his arms and kissed her passionately.

"Come," she said, with tears of thanksgiving streaming down her cheeks, "We will destroy that terrible battery. Cover up the passageway—and a change of air and scene will make my great darling well. We will sail for Europe to-morrow and never return, for you are my world, Valmond, you are my world."

"We will leave everything just as it is. Come, I feel better now. In the morning the devilish battery shall be destroyed. But I must have you with me every moment, Margery, and oh, God, Margery, don't leave me!"

"I will trust you," she said, and then she whispered, oh, so womanly, in his ear:

"I know a clergyman at the South Side; shall we go to him?"

"Yes, now," as he drew Margery towards him and folding her to his heart, called her his "guardian angel," and the great Valmond continued to weep like a child.

And in an hour they returned to the little shop as man and wife.

And yet Margery trembled at what she had done.

CHAPTER XV.

“Did you notice that gentleman that passed us?” asked Margery, as soon as they entered the house.

“Yes, it was your father; I did not know the lady with him.”

“That was my cousin Laura, and I do not feel a bit hurt because she turned away her head, for she had gossiped to father ever since I came to the shop. They probably think that we are not married,” then she added with conscious dignity, “before we leave to-morrow, I will go up and introduce my great husband.”

It was late when Margery retired, and Valmond kissed her good-night. She noticed that her husband’s lips were cold, and Margery feeling a strange chill creep through her—turned her head to the wall, and tried to sleep.

And Valmond in his night wrapper sank into his easy-chair, and commenced to think—

"Yes, the woman has conquered me—and Valmond Benditti's mission is void. The example I was to have set to all mankind has been a failure." Then raising his head—his thoughts slowly began to crystallize, "but, by God, I am not too late—for a marriage is not a marriage until consummated."

And Margery turning her head began to tremble, as she distinctly saw the strange gleams of light—flash from Valmond's eyes. But she composed herself by reasoning—

"I can easily retain him to-night, and to-morrow we will leave these scenes forever." So she continued aloud, "Valmond, darling, had you not better retire. Your wound troubles you I know, for you look as if you were in pain," and in spite of the fact that Valmond was married the temptation of St. Anthony came up vividly before him.

Then his thoughts wandered to the battery, and just how it was located—and how long it would take for the explosion to occur after the spring was drawn. Then in a moment more he gazed towards the bed—and began to long for Margery.

But what surprised him most—was in spite of the horrible battle which was beginning to rage in his soul—in all outside semblance—he was perfectly cool. Although he felt that his eyes must flash—and so Valmond turned away his head—so that Margery could not see the expression of his face. He now arose, and passing out into the shop—bathed his throbbing temples—and let the cold water from the faucet run upon his wrists—striking his pulse so that its coolness would penetrate all through his system.

Then he moved back into his easy chair—and was no sooner seated than the battle commenced again. For he reasoned, “I can leap down and touch the battery, and in a moment all will be over—and I will be immortal—and the world gain, in one stroke, five hundred years in civilization. And upon the ashes of that inactive pile of stone (a relic of the Middle Ages), will spring up a mighty monument to the grand idea—that any code of morality that has for its basis dogmas that conflict with the human understanding, will always be a

failure. And in the future, at least, will have no place in the mind of man."

But in a moment more he thought of Margery—and how beautifully her form was rounded—how warm and affectionate she was—how noble and fearless—how delightful it would be to go abroad with her, and visit foreign countries. And then he thought of her lying in his bed—*his* bed—the battle in his soul slowly developed into a raging tornado—until a perfect hurricane of tempestuous thought went tearing through his suffering soul.

"If I yield to my matrimonial desires," he reasoned, "I will be an extender of the human race myself—and then there will be no example to leave the world."

It was now that Valmond turned and looked at his wife. She was lying with one beautiful arm thrown up over her head. Her bosom rising and falling, with most charming regularity. She must be asleep—

"I will kiss her good-by, and then, by God, I'll do it!"

And as Valmond lowered his head, Margery's loving arms were wound

around his neck—and he was a fast prisoner.

“Did you think that I was asleep, darling?” and Margery smiled coquettishly, but then she added, oh so soothingly “How is Margery to sleep when Valmond is not here?” and the woman that he had sworn to love forever raised up in bed and clung to him frantically, and as Valmond felt her warm bosom against his own, the light was instantly lowered, and Valmond was conquered.

* * * * *

Valmond arose and looked at his watch. Half-past two. His wife had soothed him into a peaceful sleep,—and now he stood at the foot of the bed watching her. She was sleeping soundly. A flash of lightning, followed by a heavy clap of thunder, failed to awake her. Valmond sank into his chair and commenced to think again. And when he realized that now a child would probably be born to them—he groaned aloud—

“Why did I not do it before? Why did I not do it before? Because now I have planted the seed of another poor mortal who is to come after me—one

who was never consulted about his birth — one who will come into the world crying,—and suffer, suffer, suffer, as I have done—ever since I was born,—and have, perhaps, great and lofty ambitions that can never be realized. To be taught a code of morality — the dogmas of which he will find by his own experience in the world — a cheat, a delusion and a lie,—and in the intervening years,—struggle, struggle, struggle,—turn to some clergyman for information and truth about things that he cannot understand, and be told that to doubt any of the things he was taught in his childhood,—meant eternal damnation,—and keeping the child in ignorance as long as he can.”

The thunderstorm without now increased in violence,—and Margery still slept on. The howling wind grew into a tempest — and after a while a shrieking tornado went cursing and blaspheming past the building,—and Margery still slept on. The rain fell in torrents, and was driven in blinding sheets against the window-panes — and Margery still slept on — and the convulsions without an-

swered exactly the ravings within Valmond's tortured soul. He realized the fact that he could no longer think rationally upon any subject—and inwardly Valmond cursed the hour in which he was born, and he marveled, in his confused way, how anyone could help cursing the hour in which they were born, and Valmond, standing upright, clinched his fists—and Margery slept peacefully on.

And confused and torturing thoughts still continued to force themselves into Valmond's raving soul—while the storm without raged on.

“Life is a failure, a humbug and a fraud, and the greatest mercy that God can show his people and love for humanity, is to stop by a miracle the growth of the human race. And the only great act any true man can do, is to refrain from marriage, and thereby prevent the conception of children—children that are brought into the world by a suffering so severe that it is like pulling a human limb out by the roots, and when a mother loses her children the suffering is about as severe as the birth of the child itself.”

The storm still howled without, but Margery slept tranquilly on.

“And the church charlatans dare tell us that the church of God is the only moral teacher and the best thing for the human race. The cathedral on the hill says to marry and intermarry. The voice of an ignorant priesthood says, we command you to people the world—the priests themselves doing a large share of the peopling, and the offspring dying off by thousands in the squalid filth of the great cities, or else living to grow up in poverty and giving their hard earnings to support the Roman machine.”

The storm still raged in fury—and Margery slept on—and the ravings within Valmond’s rebellious soul were now still greater than the cursing and roaring thunderbolts without—and Margery slept on—and all through Valmond’s delirium his voice had been kept down, but the intensity of his cursing and hissing—must have sounded like the seething of steam, and Margery still slept on—realizing not that above her bed stood a raving madman.

But in a moment more Valmond fell

back into his chair exhausted—and placing his hand behind his head, and while in the act of turning and twisting, as though in his agony he would wrench it off, said:

“The woman has conquered me, and I who would have been strong have yielded like the rest, and oh, God, my God, have helped to bring more misery into the world, just like a priest or any other ordinary man, and oh, Christ, my martyrdom has been a failure!”

And now Valmond’s wild manner changed—and, sinking his head upon his hands, wept like a child—while Margery still slept on.

And after that Valmond sank into a stupor, the demon within him slowly developing again—at last Valmond’s tortured soul could stand no more, for leaping to his feet with the yell of a wild maniac—he bounded down the trap—and sprung the battery.

A terrible shock like the rending of a thousand earthquakes shook the building and rocked it as though made of paper. Valmond was thrown violently to the earth, but recovering instantly—

sprang up through the trap — and out into the street. The air he saw was filled with great masses and fragments of earth. An immense piece of debris came down and crashed through the building. But Valmond, dazed and bewildered as he was, rushed in to find Margery unconscious upon the floor, and with a great cut in her beautiful head, and Valmond swaying like a drunken man — rushed out into the air, and madly towards the site of the great cathedral.

The earth was strewn with broken fragments of all descriptions. The air heavy with dust and smoke. The rain had ceased. Valmond stumbled over something. It was a man with his head severed completely from his body. Valmond rushed on. All was silent as death. Suddenly he heard the piercing shriek of a child. Then the wild wail of a woman. She was naked, — and held an infant to her breast. It was a perfect bleeding mass. The bells of the Upper City began to ring wildly, as though heralding the day of awful doom.

Shriekings, cursings and prayers min-

gled in incoherent confusion through the midnight air.

The sky became lighted by a blazing fire from the Hollow. The old rookeries burnt like tinder. Everything was as light as day. Valmond turned and looked at the place where the cathedral once stood.

It was gone, and the thought instantly flashed through Valmond's distorted brain—

“The sunlight will now be able to strike down into the Hollow.”

For the mighty cathedral was gone, and an immense piece of the Hill carried with it. But even where Valmond stood the heat from the blazing Hollow was intense. Then Valmond saw a great army of men, women and children stampede towards the top of the Hill,—and he saw a larger army,—fall to the earth paralyzed with fear, and were devoured by the fierce flames.

Was this a part of Valmond's mission?

Then Valmond saw amid the awful havoc of impending ruin, carnage and death,—a band of women—cool, calm and collected as “guardian angels”—

commence the work of immediate assistance. One had received a blow upon the head from which the blood streamed down. But she worked on with a will until she fell dead, and almost at Valmond's feet.

They were Sisters of Charity.

A man,—a priest with nothing on but an undershirt—went stumbling over the stones—waving a cross above his head and shrieking—

“The Day of Judgment is at hand!”

“Yes,” screamed Valmond, “the Day of Judgment is at hand, and ’twas I who brought it on!”

Valmond had now reached the old building, and what reason that was left about him, comprehended that nothing was left standing except the two timbers that formed the cross.

He leaped upon it and commenced to climb. When his head was level with the top he stretched out his arms and caught his fingers in the cracks at the extreme ends of the horizontal beam. His feet rested upon a projection.

He kicked them off and with a muffled cry of agony Valmond hung suspended.

"Mercy, mercy, master!" was shrieked from the foot of the cross.

"You are a priest of Rome and an adulterer. Back, back, and out of the way!" screamed Valmond in agony.

All the earth was light as day.

"And you," cried a woman's voice, "are a blaspheming madman, and I will prove to you now how well I loved you."

A pistol shot rang out.

It was Margery.

"I must denounce you living, but, Valmond, oh, my Valmond, I will love you dead!"

And in a moment more Valmond's fierce struggle had ceased, for he fell to the ground a corpse.

And Margery, standing like a prophet of old, but in her rent and torn drapery, her expressive face covered with blood—her eyes blazing with wild excitement—raised her hand above with a gesture amidst the awful havoc of impending chaos, so fine, so suggestive and grand, that many prostrated themselves before her.

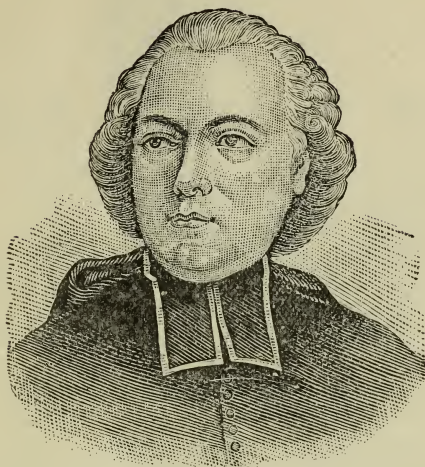
"Oh, Valmond, Valmond, my poor misguided love! You are like thousands of

infidel reformers who have gone before you; you have destroyed but builded nothing."

And in a moment more the imprecating hand was slowly lowered—as Margery fell dead across his body.

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
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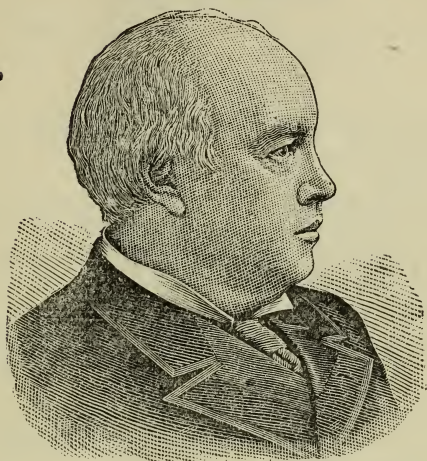
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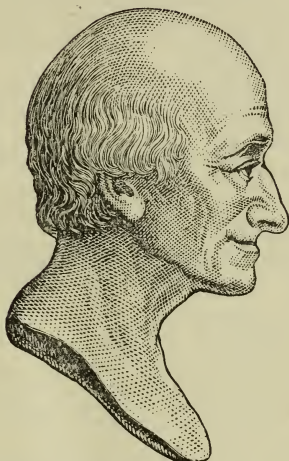
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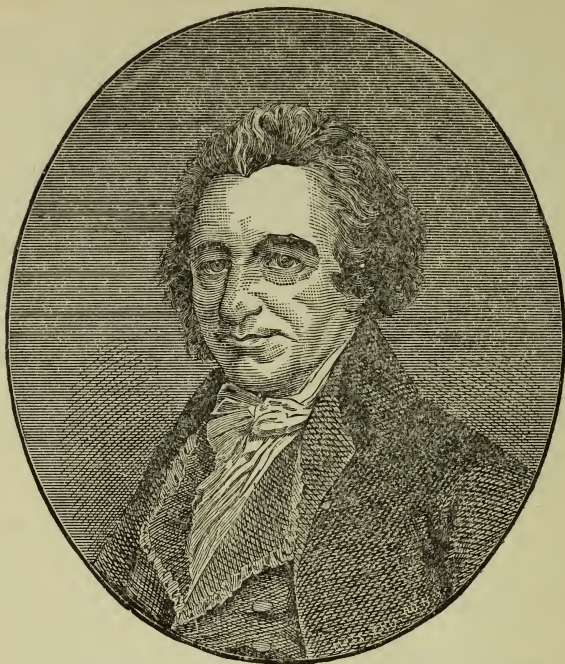
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
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
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
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